

Golf Digest



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LOUIE'S

GUIDE TO

EASY POWER

**4 SHOTS
TO SAVE PAR**
BY BUTCH
HARMON

NEW RANKING
THE WORLD'S
100 GREATEST
COURSES

**7 HOT NEW
DRIVERS**

THE MONEY
ISSUE

► **50 RICHEST
TOUR PROS**

► **SPIETH
OVERTAKES
WOODS**

► **INSIDE PHIL'S
WALLET**

► **THE PAYOFF
FOR PLAYING
ALL-OUT**

Louis Oosthuizen gets you 20 more yards.



I AM



The background is dark, with a diagonal line running from the top left towards the center. The area to the left of this line has a subtle checkered or pixelated pattern. The text is centered horizontally and stands out prominently in a bright yellow color.

NOT ALONE.



ON 2.19.16

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**THE #1
DRIVER
IN THE
WORLD.
PERIOD.**





THERE'S M AND THERE'S THEM.

M1 IS PLAYED BY MORE TOUR PLAYERS
WORLDWIDE THAN ANY OTHER DRIVER.

MORE THAN TITLEIST 915

MORE THAN THE ENTIRE CALLAWAY BRAND

MORE THAN CLEVELAND, COBRA, NIKE AND PING COMBINED

#UNMETALWOOD



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Editor's Letter



Dropping the Ball

JERRY TARDE

Chairman and Editor-in-Chief

I pledge allegiance to the Golf Association of the United States of America, and to the public courses for which it stands, one game, unbifurcated, with handicap strokes for all. Or at least I always felt that way until the latest ruling from the USGA disqualified for handicap purposes any rounds recorded alone. ▶ You now can't turn in a score if you play by yourself. Presumably you have to be watched to ensure you're not cheating. Isn't honesty the backbone of the game we all love? ▶ I'm reminded of that charming USGA commercial from the 2000 U.S. Open showing a kid playing alone at dusk, making a hole-in-one, jumping up and down, then looking around to see if anybody saw it. Good thing an old greenkeeper on a cart was passing by, or it wouldn't have counted.

The governing body tweeted: "The USGA Handicap System is built on integrity, with peer review being crucial to confirming a player's potential scoring ability."

Sounds like hokum to me.

The Canadian Golf Federation agrees and tweeted back it wasn't going to adopt the USGA change: "Scores made while playing alone will continue to count for handicap purposes." Those Canadians understand how to appreciate every round.

Peer review? We know that's a sham. As one rules expert told me, "The only folks whose handicaps are peer-reviewed are the SOB sandbaggers who win tournaments. Their phony

numbers tend to be reviewed after they've won."

Further scrutiny reveals golf's dirty little secret: The number of American golfers with handicaps hasn't budged in almost 30 years, and handicaps are an affectation of the rich. Based on about 25 million U.S. golfers, fewer than five million have a USGA Handicap Index. An educated guess is that 80 percent of private-club members and only 10-15 percent of public-course players have a handicap. These numbers are sketchy because the USGA admits it doesn't track them—a colossal failure. In most enterprises, somebody's Key Performance Indicators would be based on growing these numbers.

Why isn't the governing body more concerned about the decline in American golfers and using all its assets to promote the game? In the Internet age,

handicaps should be free and easy, but the USGA is trying to protect state and regional golf associations that derive income almost entirely from handicapping services. It's like protecting railroads by banning air travel. The rules-makers should use their billion dollars in Fox TV money and mount a campaign to "get every golfer a handicap." They've dropped the ball.

The genius of handicapping is that it allows everybody, no matter their ability, to compete against each other in golf. Almost no other sport has that gear. You can't play one-on-one with Steph Curry. You can't last a round with Luke Rockhold. You can't have a game with Novak Djokovic. But you can play matches all day long with Jordan Spieth.

Instead, the USGA is focused on disqualifying rounds played alone. And banning yippers who anchor their long putters—that's another rule going into effect this January after 40 years of acceptance. I think Oscar Wilde said, put enough lawyers in a room with the door closed, and eventually they'll turn the Rules of Golf into the U.S. Tax Code.

Let's start our own campaign. If the USGA doesn't want to give you a handicap, Golf Digest will. It won't be "official," but it's free and allows you to play rounds alone and anchor your putter. Just go to handicap.golfdigest.com. Serious players should join a USGA club and get an official handicap, but try ours while you're waiting to get serious.

THE WORLD'S BEST AND WORST

This issue updates the World 100 Greatest Courses (see page 78), but go to golfdigest.com/go/planetgolf for the complete list of the best courses in every golf country in the world. It's an indispensable guide for the global golfer. A record 206 countries have courses ranked on the list.

We also track the countries without golf courses, this year 39 of them, from Iraq and Yemen as the most populous to the Holy See (Vatican) and Pitcairn Islands as the least. I checked in for reaction with our contributing editor Tom Friedman, who also doubles as the foreign-affairs columnist for The New York Times.

"I am amazed at how many places I've played, including Beirut, Tehran, Israel, Russia, Egypt, Morocco and Cameroon," Friedman said. "While it's clear that the presence of a golf course doesn't guarantee stability—see Syria [with one course]—it's very obvious that the absence of sufficient links seems to be associated with failed states and civil war. You wonder what came first: state failure or the failure to build a proper 18 where people could take out their aggravation on a golf ball rather than on each other!" **G**

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RICKIE FOWLER



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A family member is on their deathbed

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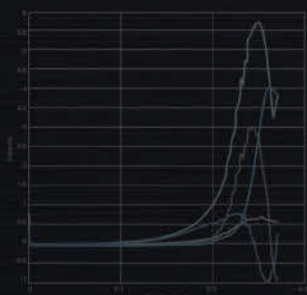
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Play

Sergio on Driving

Simple tips
for boosting
power and
control



WHETHER HE'S BEING HUMBLE, matter-of-fact or simply doesn't want to reveal the secrets of his extraordinary ball-striking, Sergio Garcia rarely talks swing mechanics. He's a "feel player," he says, and tries to keep things as simple as possible: *Focus on the target and then make a confident swing.* But when pressed on how he has been able to sustain remarkable distance and accuracy off the tee, El Niño, now in his 18th year as a pro, did share some telling insights. Here's what he had to say. —WITH RON KASPRISKE

My thought from the top: *Imagine you're pulling a chain*

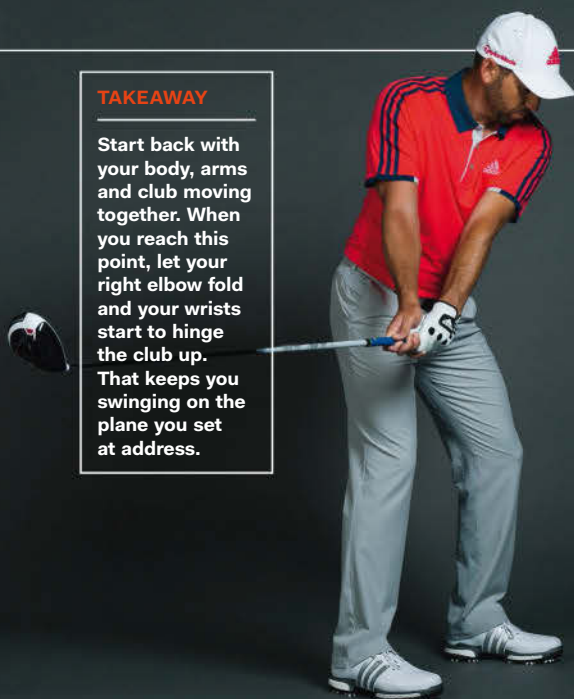
SETUP

I like to feel tall and relaxed at address. A lot of golfers hunch over the ball and really tense up, which restricts the whole motion. You want to be athletic, never rigid. I check my address posture all the time.



TAKEAWAY

Start back with your body, arms and club moving together. When you reach this point, let your right elbow fold and your wrists start to hinge the club up. That keeps you swinging on the plane you set at address.



DOWNSWING

Coming down, the only thought I've ever used is one my dad taught me: Feel like you're pulling a chain down with both hands. That keeps you from releasing the club early. Let the clubhead lag behind and then whip it through.



IMPACT

Look at the position of the butt of my grip compared with the last photo: It went from pointing down to pointing up. I'm letting the club release. Amateurs often force the club down to impact. Try to stay loose and let it gain momentum.



down with both hands.

BACKSWING

As you wind up, you want your front shoulder turning down. This is a power move, because it helps create more torque in your body that you can release coming down. It also helps you hit the ball from the inside. That's where your power is.



AT THE TOP

My swing is more compact than it used to be—you can see I'm not quite to parallel—and that helps my control. It's important to not be in a hurry to get down to the ball. Finish what you're doing going back, or your swing will be out of sync.



POST-IMPACT

When tour players talk about staying down through the shot, this is what they mean. The ball is long gone, and I'm still basically in the same posture I was at impact. If you struggle to hit the ball solid, focus on staying down longer.



FINISH

Your tempo determines how you finish. If you swing wildly, your finish will look off-balance and incomplete. Try to move the club fastest at impact, not before. Sync this with your body rotation, and you'll maximize distance and accuracy.





The Path to More Pars and Birdies

My two-tee drill will improve your accuracy

Most amateurs I see spend a great deal of time focused on the break of a putt and, to a lesser extent, the speed. Those are key fundamentals for sure, but equally important is making a good stroke. Swinging the putterhead on a consistent path will help you start the ball on the line you pick.

To groove your stroke, try my two-tee drill. Find a straight putt and stand 10 feet from the cup on that line. Set the putterhead down facing the hole, and stick two tees in the green—one just outside the toe of the putter and the other just outside the heel. The tees create a gate (*right*) that you'll have to swing the putterhead through to keep it on a straight path to the hole.

Once you can routinely make practice strokes where the putterhead swings through the gate without touching either tee, set a ball between them and hit some putts (*below*). Miss the tees, and you'll start filling up the cup.



ELEMENTARY WATSON

▶ One of the reasons target shooters are so accurate is that they work on controlling their breathing. Take a cue from them when you hit putts. Make a couple of practice strokes, then address the ball. Inhale deeply and start to breathe out—but hold it about halfway and stroke the putt. I've found over the years that I putt significantly better when I breathe like this.

Excerpted from the DVD "Lessons of a Lifetime II," by Tom Watson.



ILLUSTRATION: MIKE LYNCH • POLO GOLF: SHIRT, \$90, PANTS, \$198 • RALPH LAUREN: BELT, \$495

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“Sometimes the yardage to the green doesn’t matter.”

Bear of a Par 3

Will you take on the big bunker?

On a long par 3, don’t let the yardage intimidate you. Often there’s no need to carry the ball all the way to the middle of the green.

Take the third hole at the Pronghorn Club (*illustrated*) in Bend, Ore., which tips at 253 yards and is typically set a hair over 200 yards for the members. This is a basic design model I’ve used on many of my courses—a large, raised bunker guarding a low green with assistance available to the shorter hitter.

What kind of assistance? If you don’t feel comfortable flying the ball all the way to the green, simply carry it past that high bunker and allow the downslope leading to the green to feed it there. Or, play away from the bunker and leave a simple chip shot.

None of these three strategies is the most correct. All that matters is what plays to your strong suit at that particular moment.

—WITH MAX ADLER

AVOID DISASTER

There’s no shame in playing to here. The worst mistake is leaving a lengthy sand shot, so taking on that massive bunker on the right isn’t always smart. The left side of this fairway sits below the green, so you won’t be able to run one on from the tee. But you can chip your second shot close to set up an easy par; odds are you won’t make worse than 4. If you’re cruising along nicely, a bogey might be all you need to keep that good round going.

LOOK FOR THE HELP

When I can, I generally prefer to hit a long iron than any sort of hybrid or wood into a green. (My potential for dispersion is wider on my clubs with headcovers.) Because this downslope beyond the bunker will propel a ball toward the green, you can choose a shorter club. Into a strong wind, a low punch shot that just carries the bunker might be a smarter play than ballooning a longer club into the sky.

CARRY WITH CONFIDENCE

Standing on the tee, you might be having the day’s first frank discussion about how far your fairway wood or longest iron—maybe even your driver—is carrying. That’s good. Ball-striking is like the weather, even for great players. Only a stubborn fool believes his clubs fly the same distances every day. If you feel up to carrying the ball straight to the green, great. No need to make this hole any more complicated than one good swing.

EVERYTHING IN THE BAG

Sometimes the world’s best have to swing serious lumber on par 3s, too. On the PGA Tour, a good example is No. 4 at Riviera Country Club. That hole tips at 236 yards and has a giant bunker on the left, putting the lay-up shot to the right. In my days playing the L.A. Open there, it was usually a decision between my 1-iron and 3-wood. I liked the 1-iron, because I always felt the long irons were an advantage for me.

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1



Better Golf on Tap

Finally, those bar skills pay off

BY ERIKA LARKIN

Every teacher looks for ways to give students a familiar feel to connect with their golf games. It doesn't get much more familiar than bar games, many of which involve skills that translate nicely to golf.

Consider the moves and concepts from these four common games—darts, cornhole, poker

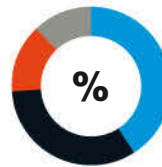
and Ping-Pong—that can simplify and improve your approach to the full swing, short game and on-course strategy. All it takes is some imagination and maybe a few cheap props.

The best part is that you probably use all of these skills without even thinking about them. That will make them a lot

easier to remember and reference when you're holding a golf club out on the course—where you really need a simple, clear swing thought.

So go ahead and toil over these assignments with the adult beverage of your choice. Call it happy hour. For your golf game.

—WITH MATTHEW RUDY



In which game do you think good golfers tend to excel?

- ▶ Ping-Pong: 41%
- ▶ Cornhole: 33%
- ▶ Darts: 14%
- ▶ Cards: 12%

SOURCE: GOLF DIGEST READERS

1. GOING FOR THE BULL'S-EYE

The most important part of the swing happens at the bottom, when the clubhead releases through the ball and into the turf. If you release early, you cast away your power. If you release late, you won't square the face. To develop your sense of timing, throw darts at a board on the ground in front of you (*previous page*). Feel when the dart has to leave your fingers to hit the board. Too early, and you'll miss behind it. Too late, and you'll throw the dart down the range.

2. SHORT SHOTS ARE A TOSS-UP

Even if you don't know a thing about cornhole—my favorite bar game—it makes sense that you need to hold the beanbag palm-up to toss it into the air, right? Your short game works on the same idea. Let your arms swing naturally and your body move dynamically in response. Think of your lower hand coming through impact with the palm facing upward. If you turn that hand—and the clubface—down, you'll lose loft and dig the club's leading edge into the ground.

3. PLAY THE HAND YOU'RE DEALT

Poker doesn't have much physical action, but the decisions you make are similar to the ones you face on the course. You might get dealt great cards early but then run into trouble, or a bad hand might be saved by good cards at the end. In both games, stay patient and measured in your emotions. For every striped drive that ends up in a divot, there's a pull-hook that sits up perfectly in the rough. One more tip: Know when to fold 'em and just get the ball back in play.

4. GETTING A FEEL FOR THE FACE

In golf, the clubhead is far from your hands, which can make it hard to see the relationship between them. You don't have the same problem with a Ping-Pong paddle. You wouldn't hold it with your hand wrapped under the grip or around on top. You want your palm to mirror the face for maximum control. Go for the same connection when you set your grip on a golf club.

Erika Larkin runs the Larkin Golf Learning Community, Bristow, Va.

2



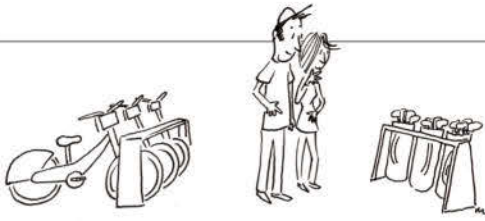
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skirt, \$60
shoes, \$80
glove, \$22

3



4





Why'd I Do That?

You need to loft one, but you catch it in the teeth

Faced with a short pitch over a bunker, your plan is to throw the ball up in the air and stop it fast. Instead, the leading edge of your wedge slams into the middle of the ball and sends it over the green. We call that “hitting it in the teeth.”

Many people think the cause of this sickening shot is falling onto the back foot during the downswing in an attempt to lift the ball over the bunker. That's part of it, but the real culprit is the breakdown, or cupping, of the left wrist through impact.

To hit it high, you want your left arm and the shaft in a line at

impact, pointing straight down to the ball. Your wedge has lots of loft, so you don't have to try to add more by scooping, which causes the left wrist to cup and the club to swing up at the ball.

This problem often can be traced to a short backswing, resulting from tension. Feel your wrists stay passive going back and move your lead arm and the shaft together to the ball.

Another cause of the left wrist breaking down is a lazy through-swing. You want more speed coming through—think *crisp*—for soft pitches that stop fast. Your ball will thank you.



PUT A PICTURE IN YOUR MIND

PA mechanical breakdown can result from a mental breakdown—a lack of confidence, fear of consequences, etc. Practicing the shot is key, but here are a few on-course tips. Breathe deeply to keep your muscles loose. Pick a landing spot, and picture the ball rolling to the hole. A good picture will tell the body what to do. Stare at that spot a few seconds, then let the technique from your practice take over.

—PAUL SCHEMP, PH.D.



SO MUCH FOR 'THIN TO WIN'

PIn the 2009 Masters, Kenny Perry (above) stuffed one to inches on 16 to lead by two with two to go. But on 17 he thinned a pitch clear across the green. A bogey there and another on 18 put him in a playoff with Chad Campbell and Angel Cabrera, who went on to win. “I can't stop my right hand when I get nervous,” Perry said. “It wants to shoot a little bit, and I can't calm it down.”

Rick Smith is a Golf Digest Teaching Professional.



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Kevin Na might be most remembered as the tour pro who couldn't hit the ball. Witness several "whiffs" on tee shots a few years back, when he would get stuck on the downswing and pull up just before impact, purposely missing the ball. TV commentators called it the driver yips.

"I just wasn't confident in my swing mechanics," says the 32-year-old native of

South Korea. Na knew something had to change, so he returned to teacher Don Brown of Wilmington, Calif., whom he started with at 15. Student and teacher went to work, and three years later, the results are impressive.

Na credits a combination of new learning and overcoming old habits. For instance, he was taught as a kid to swing out to right field, an outdated concept they've worked

to erase. "He has the opposite problem from the average golfer [who cuts across the ball]," Brown says. "I simply want him to keep his arms following his body through the shot."

Brown says Na's work ethic has made the difference. He has eight second-place finishes to go with a victory at the Las Vegas event in 2011. After three top-3s in late 2015, Na is ready to win again. —ROGER SCHIFFMAN



Kevin Na

Turning a bizarre swing glitch into motivation

SOLID CENTER

▶ At address and starting back, Kevin Na is the epitome of balance. "Both side to side and front to back, he finds his center," says his teacher, Don Brown. "But I would like to see a little wider base." Brown says amateurs should take note: "Kevin's trunk and arms start together. That promotes consistency."

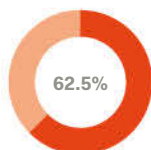
WINDING THE SPRING

▶ Brown doesn't use the term "turn" to describe body motion—he thinks it promotes the right shoulder coming over and around on the downswing. "Kevin winds his shoulders, then unwinds them," Brown says. "His lower body is very stable, knees staying flexed. He has really refined his backswing."

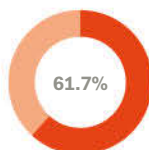
QUIET AT THE TOP

▶ Notice you can see the butt end of the grip, indicating that Na chokes down for control. "There's a reason a baseball bat has a knob," Brown says. "It's so you don't grab it at the end." Brown notes that LPGA star Lydia Ko does the same. He says it keeps the club quiet at the top, no "bouncing" of the shaft or clubhead.

► DRIVING ACCURACY



Kevin Na (84th)

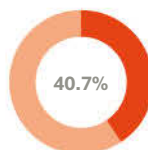


Tour average

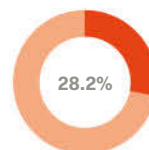


Francesco Molinari (1st)

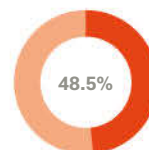
► SCRAMBLING >30 YARDS



Kevin Na (4th)



Tour average



Henrik Stenson (1st)

SOURCE: SHOTLINK (2015)



NO BALKING HERE

▶ Making a free-flowing downswing is no longer a problem for Na. "Notice his head position has changed from the previous photo," Brown says. "He tilts back a little, which allows him to hit up on the ball." Brown says he'd like Na's right knee to stay back a little longer. "I want him to keep that stability with the lower body."

STAYING BEHIND IT

▶ At impact, the clubface is dead square. "That's the most important thing in golf," Brown says. "Kevin does it by moving his arms and body in sync and having his left wrist flat at impact." For lower-body support, Brown says, "I like the back heel to stay close to the ground at least halfway through the downswing."

ALL TOGETHER NOW

▶ According to Brown, most golfers would improve if they tried to swing the arms past the body. Na stays behind the ball and pushes up through impact, which boosts his swing speed. Brown says Na keeps his arms on his trunk better than he used to. "His arms follow his body through, and he's picture-perfect at the finish."

PRO-FILE

KEVIN NA
32 / 5-11 / 167 pounds
Las Vegas

DRIVER
Titleist 915D3
9.5 degrees

BALL
Titleist Pro V1x

★ **TITLEIST** visor, \$22
FOOTJOY shoes, \$180

Photographs by Dom Furore

Piped Dreams

Seven new drivers that take the sting out of mis-hits

There was a time when drivers were designed to work really well when hit perfectly. But today's club engineers know that's not the real world. Says Callaway's Evan Gibbs: "A lot of clubhead design is about trying to minimize the damage of what happens when you incorrectly deliver the clubhead to the ball." In other words, the newest drivers might get you better results than maybe your swing deserves. Some models use weighting or aerodynamic features to increase your swing speed. Others help your misses go farther and straighter via thin faces and more stable heads. Here are seven examples:

XXIO XX109

► Sure, the sweet spot is larger thanks to a face that extends farther around the crown in the toe and heel. But what's intriguing is how the heavier head and lighter shaft combine to help you swing tighter and faster.

PRICE \$650

COBRA KING F6+

► The adjustable track in the sole means that each loft setting can play like a different driver: from low spin to high forgiveness. The carbon composite in the track allows room for the 18-gram sliding weight.

PRICE \$400

TOUR EDGE EXOTICS EX9

► Here are two fixes many golfers need: A sole channel takes away weight that's then redistributed on the perimeter to increase forgiveness, and extra weight in the heel minimizes a slice.

PRICE \$300

Today's club design is about minimizing mis-hits.



CALLAWAY
XR 16

► Working with Boeing, Callaway used a step in the crown to make the head aerodynamically sleeker. A thin face saves weight to make for a more stable head.

PRICE \$350



PING
G

► A dragonfly's wings inspired the thinned-out sections in the crown. Less material on top means weight can be pushed lower and deeper than any Ping driver ever.

PRICE \$400

NIKE
VAPOR FLY

► With a crown as thin as half a millimeter, the center of gravity shifts lower for less spin and a higher launch. The thin sole channel makes the face more flexible, too.

PRICE \$350

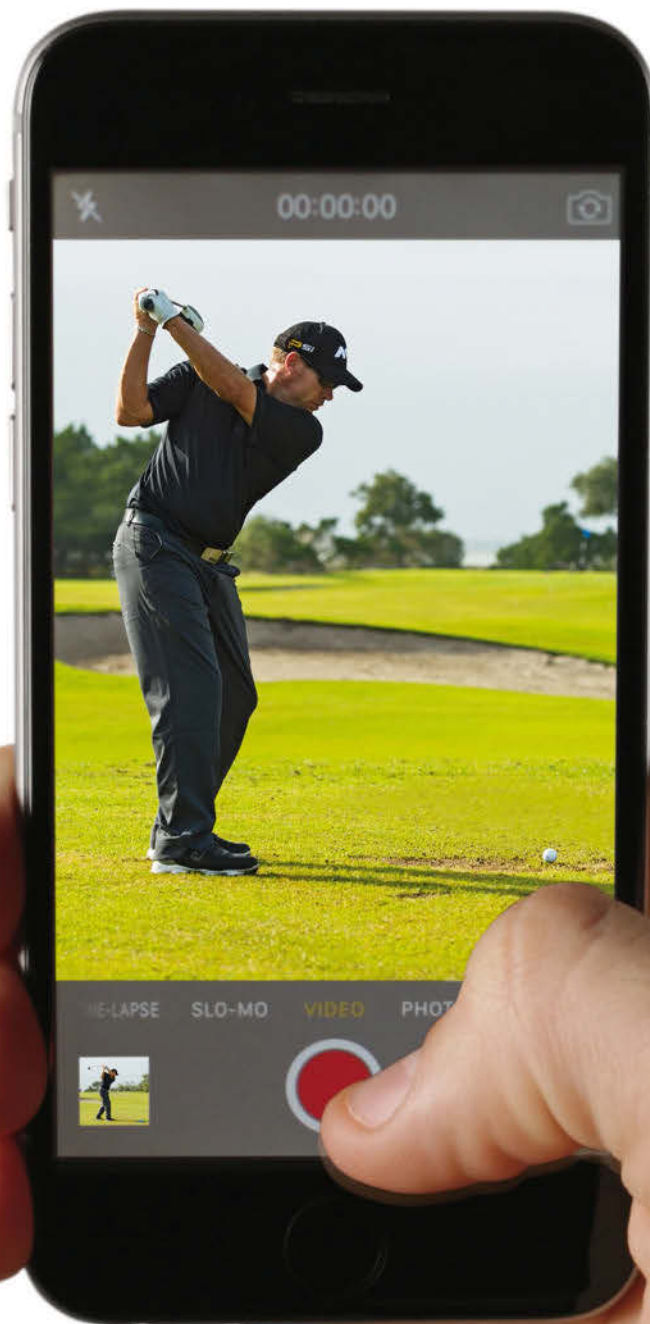
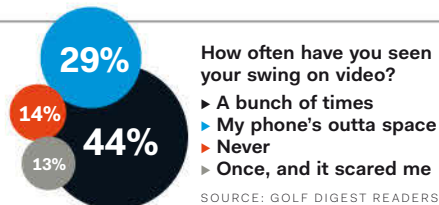


BRIDGESTONE
JGR

► To help shots launch higher, the crown is thinner up front and thicker toward the back, allowing the face to give at impact. Sole screws let you dial in more draws.

PRICE \$300





WHAT ARE THE THINGS I get asked the most about on Twitter? Tiger Woods and your golf swing.

We'll save Tiger for another day, but if you want help with your swing, here are a few tips for shooting it that will help me—or whoever's looking—provide useful advice.

The two main ways to look at the swing are face-on (directly across from the player) and down the line (aiming the camera down-range). Both angles have their advantages. Face-on shows some setup angles, the grip, body position and weight shift, but it isn't the best view for a thorough diagnosis.

If you're picking one angle, shoot down the line, from behind the player looking at the target (*left*). Set the camera about chest high and on an imaginary line halfway between the ball and the feet. Make sure it's far enough back so the whole club is visible throughout the backswing. Have a friend hold the camera, or clip it to your bag or cart.

From there, you can see the club swing in relation to the target and where the ball starts in relation to where you're aiming. I'm looking for the thing that causes your big miss. You don't have to see—or fix—everything, but an accurate video is important.

Hank Haney is based at the Hank Haney Golf Ranch, Lewisville, Texas. To get fixed in *Golf Digest*, send Hank your swing on Twitter: @HankHaney.

How to Video Your Swing

Make sure you get these details right



MYRTLE BEACH

SPRING GOLF 2016

Round up your buddies and dust off your clubs—the Sweet '16 golf season has arrived in Myrtle Beach. Lose those winter blues and save some green while the best package deals are still available. In Myrtle Beach, Southern hospitality and spring sunshine are always on the house.

GOLF TOWN USA

"Golf Town USA" is more than just a nickname for Myrtle Beach. **GolfTownUSA.com** is a portal that gives you direct access to the area's 100+ golf courses—51 of which have been rated at a "superior" four stars or above in Golf Digest's Best Places to Play.

And there's never been a better time than this spring for you and your favorite golf buddies to plan a trip to the Myrtle Beach area. That's because local club owners have doubled down on enhancing the customer experience by investing millions of dollars in their golf courses.

In recent years, a total of 24 Myrtle Beach area courses—including some of the region's most prominent—have installed new greens and made additional improvements as part of substantial upgrades to enhance their already legendary value.

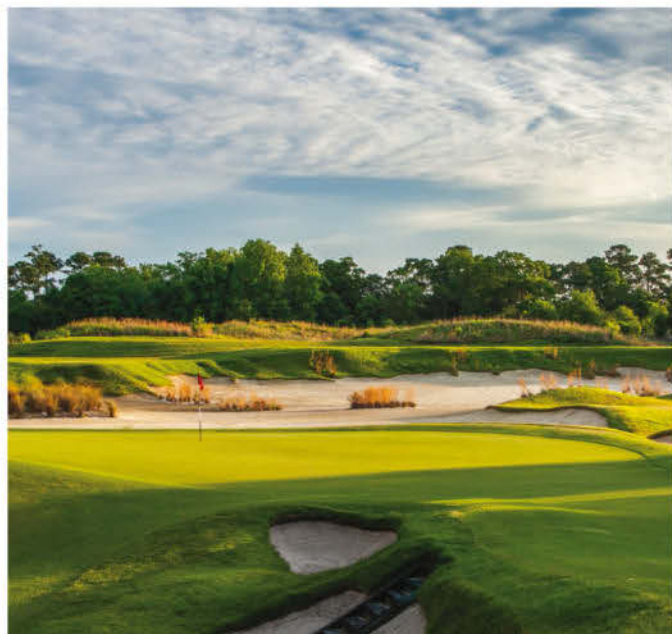
In just the past year, Tidewater and River's Edge, two of the best and most scenic local courses, have completed major renovation projects. Tidewater, which plays along the marshlands of Cherry Grove and the Intracoastal Waterway, has expanded every fairway, improved drainage, and opened up the layout with

tree-removal work. And River's Edge, an Arnold Palmer design set along the Shallotte River, has installed new Sunday Ultradwarf Bermuda grass among other refinements. As a result, both of these acclaimed courses are playing better than ever.

Not to be overshadowed, Myrtle Beach's iconic Dunes Club course is in peak condition following renovations that included new greens and subtle architectural tweaks. The list goes on, but the bottom line is clear: Dozens of the best Myrtle Beach area golf courses have enhanced the quality of play you deserve, while retaining the value you expect.



The 14th hole at Blackmoor Golf Club, designed by Gary Player.



True Blue Golf Club is one of 12 award-winning courses on the Waccamaw Golf Trail.

Before the summer family vacation season begins, tens of thousands of hotel rooms, multi-bedroom condos and spacious beach homes are available for golfers. Nearly all can be booked in stay-and-play packages that include preferred tee times. Likewise, the local restaurants, nightclubs and golf superstores welcome players with early-season discounts. And you'll save some serious bucks on travel expenses, too, whether you take a roadtrip or book a flight on one of the eight airlines now serving the expanded Myrtle Beach International Airport.

Enhanced quality and traditional value—that's what you'll enjoy with a Myrtle Beach golf vacation this spring. Get more information and a free customized golf-package quote at GolfTownUSA.com.

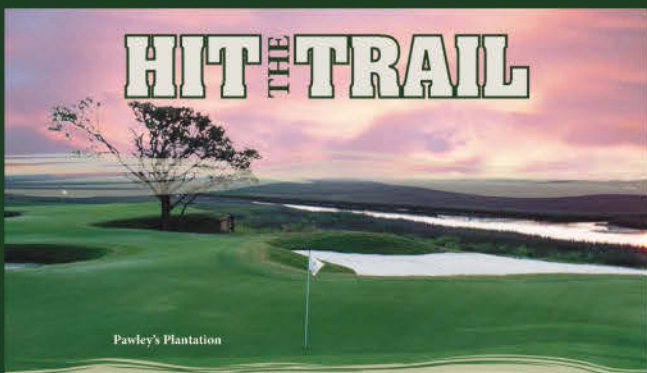
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The **Waccamaw Golf Trail**, located along the historic Hammock Coast between Myrtle Beach and Charleston, features 12 top-rated courses, including Caledonia, True Blue, Pawleys Plantation, TPC Myrtle Beach and Heritage Club. The award-winning golf is complemented by great restaurants, unique shops and a wide range of accommodations. Check out this season's special deals at WaccamawGolf.com. Receive a **complimentary round** with your online quote request.

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MYRTLE BEACH SPRING GOLF 2016



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The Founders Collection includes 22 of the Myrtle Beach area's most requested courses and the promise of an unrivaled quality of play. "The Granddaddy" at historic Pine Lakes Country Club, Arnold Palmer's iconic King's North at Myrtle Beach National and the Jack Nicklaus-designed gems at Long Bay Club and Pawleys Plantation top the list for visiting players. And the game's finest golfers have risen to the challenge at TPC Myrtle Beach, site of the 2000 Senior Tour Championship, and at Grande Dunes Resort Club, co-host of the 2014 PGA Professional National Championship.

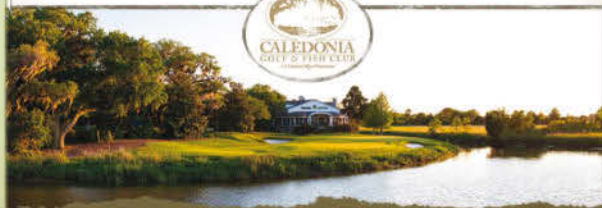
A commitment to growing the game and improving every golfer's skills begins with Myrtle Beach Golf Trips spokesperson Meredith Kirk, named one of Golf Digest's "Best Teachers under 40" for 2014-15 and ranked 3rd among the "Best Teachers in South Carolina" for 2015-16. World-class instruction is available at the award-winning Mel Sole Golf Schools, as well as the Dustin Johnson Golf School at TPC Myrtle Beach, which will host the inaugural Dustin Johnson World Junior Championship from February 13-15, 2016. And if your junior partner isn't quite ready for that

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level of competition yet, check out the year-round "Kids Play Free" programs at all Founders Collection courses.

But right now you and your buddies are focused on scheduling a Myrtle Beach golf getaway this spring that gives you the finest value for your hard-earned money. So the Founders Collection is rolling out the green carpet for 2016 with a guarantee of the best pricing and tee-time availability on their 22 featured courses and more than 50 others in the Myrtle Beach area. Save even more on the popular Myrtle Beach Golf Trips multi-round deals, including the Rewards Package that features a \$100 Rewards Card and dinner for every member of your group.

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Nothing wrong with posing after you've nailed a tee shot.



Finish Strong

Swing it like The Big Easy

After all these years, Ernie Els still swings the club like he's out for a Sunday stroll. There's real power and effort behind his tee shots, but you'd never know that if you judged his swing only by its tempo. On the flip side, many amateurs take a wild hack at the ball, like it just insulted a family member. If you want a smooth-looking swing like The Big Easy's, follow these steps to better tempo.

David Leadbetter is a Golf Digest Teaching Professional.

1. SQUEEZE, THEN RELAX



► Tension breeds poor tempo. It starts with a tight grip. To feel how lightly you should hold the club, squeeze the handle as hard as you can, then relax. Sense the lightness, especially in your forearms.

2. REMEMBER TO BREATHE



► Quick test: Take a deep breath and hold it. Do you feel some of your muscles tightening? This is the opposite of your goal when you swing. Exhale to relax the muscles before starting the club back.

3. FEEL THE CLUB'S WEIGHT



► Instead of standing still, wagging the club by moving your wrists back and forth is a great ignition for your swing. But it also helps you feel the weight of the clubhead—important for a fluid motion.

4. DON'T SKIMP GOING BACK



► Complete the windup of your backswing to avoid the urge to swing down aggressively as a compensation. You don't want to ruin your rhythm and tempo. A full backswing leads to a smooth through-swing.



GRAEME McDOWELL
AGE 36

LIVES Orlando

STORY Won the 2010 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach. The OHL Classic at Mayakoba title in November was his third victory on the PGA Tour.

LEADOFF MAN

Going out first against Jordan Spieth at the 2014 Ryder Cup was a big role. Sometimes when you want something so bad, you get in your own way. I got down early, but I kept trying to win the next hole and extend the match. Eventually, it turned around, and I won, 2 and 1.

THE GOOD LIFE

I built a wine cellar in my house. It holds a couple hundred bottles. I'm not a wine expert, but I have an appreciation for it.

—WITH E. MICHAEL JOHNSON

| CLUB | YDS* |
|-----------------|------|
| DRIVER | 268 |
| 3-WOOD | 245 |
| 4-WOOD | 230 |
| 3-HYBRID | 215 |
| 4-IRON | 208 |
| 5-IRON | 198 |
| 6-IRON | 188 |
| 7-IRON | 173 |
| 8-IRON | 160 |
| 9-IRON | 148 |
| PW | 128 |
| GW | 115 |
| LW | 95 |
| *carry distance | |

HYBRID

SPECS Adams Idea a7 PNT, 22°, Miyazaki Kusala Indigo 83 shaft, X-flex

In my bag for eight years, it's a bit battered and bruised. A good go-to club.

IRONS

SPECS Srixon Z 745 (4-iron through 9-iron), Project X 6.5 flighted shafts, Golf Pride Tour Velvet 60 grips, D-3 swingweight

I'm a muscle-back guy. I like how they set up. I've used flighted shafts for about 15 years.

WEDGES

SPECS Cleveland 588 RTX 2.0 (48°, 52°) and Cleveland 588 RTX (58°), Project X 6.5 Flighted shafts

I don't like to get into funky grinds with my wedges. It's too difficult to duplicate when you get a new set of wedges.



Another sleeve, please
I use six to nine Srixon Z-Star XV balls a round. On a course where I use more wedges, I tend to tear them up a bit more.

DRIVER

SPECS Callaway Optiforce 440, 9.5°, 44.75 inches, Mitsubishi Diamana W-Series 50 shaft, X-flex, D-3 swingweight

I changed drivers mid-event at Mayakoba back to this one. I've used it more than any other the last couple of years.



Handy tool This Swiss Army knife is helpful when the tailor has sewn the back pockets of a new pair of trousers.



Moonlighting

I'm part owner of Nona Blue, a restaurant in Orlando that opened in 2013. A second one is set to open in Ponte Vedra Beach, and I hope to have it going by the Players in May.

FAIRWAY WOODS

SPECS Srixon Z F45, 13° (42.5 inches) and 17° (42 inches), Miyazaki Kusala Indigo shafts, X-flex, D-4 swingweight

The shafts are shorter than standard. That makes the swingweight too light, so I added lead tape to the soles of both woods.

PUTTER

SPECS Odyssey White Hot #7, 34 inches, 4" loft

I won the 2010 U.S. Open with this putter, so it holds a lot of good memories. I tried a different putter last year, but then I went through a process of simplifying things. Going back to old faithful was a big part of that.



Home away from home

Baker's Bay is a resort in the Bahamas. We're starting to build a house there, and when I need extra motivation, this bag reminds me I need to work hard so we can finish it.



Life

THE CORE

Sea Worthy

Why golfers like Natalie Gulbis say this is their favorite exercise

A helicopter hovering over the ocean is rarely a good sign. Recent sightings of at least one hammerhead shark off the coast of Newport Beach, Calif., made a lot of people skittish about getting into the water this past fall, and the sound of rotor blades one October morning made PGA Tour member Natalie Gulbis even more alarmed.

"They're looking for the shark. Maybe we should head over to the harbor instead of getting in the water here," said Gulbis, repeating the suggestion to reinforce the urgency. The California native knows how to read ocean danger like

a 20-foot double breaker, so her concerns were justified. She had come down to the water that day, just walking distance from her home with husband Josh Rodarmel, to discuss and demonstrate the benefits of stand-up paddle boarding for golfers. She has been a convert to the sport since Davis Love III showed her how to do it off the coast of Sea Island, Ga., in 2010. Gulbis says she'll paddle every day when she's on a break from the tour and even squeeze in a session or two during a tournament week at a warm-weather location.

On this day, it looked like the mission would be scrubbed, but then things took a fortuitous turn. "Look, look," she shouted. "It's a dolphin!" No more than 50 yards from the beach, the profile

of a dolphin could be seen surfacing multiple times. Gulbis scrambled for her iPhone to get a shot, but the sighting was more significant than that—at least for her. The presence of dolphins typically puts surfers' minds at ease, because many believe sharks keep their distance when dolphins are present. True or not, it was the clincher for Gulbis to paddle out past the high surf and show off her technique.

"I do a lot of things to stay in shape—jog, yoga, lift weights—but paddle boarding is one of my favorite things by far," says Gulbis, who joined the LPGA in 2002 and has one victory. "I've had three back surgeries and a procedure on my hip, and the last was five years ago. I've had no back problems since I began paddle boarding. This past year was the first year on tour in like a decade where I didn't pull out of an event because of an injury."

If you've never seen or tried paddle boarding, the easiest way to explain how it's done is that you stand and balance yourself face forward on an oversize surfboard (up to 14 feet long) and use an extra-long paddle to row

along the water. To navigate, you have to alternate which side of the board you paddle.

Gulbis said she got the go-ahead to start paddle boarding from her swing coach, Butch Harmon, who had seen a handful of his players use it to stay in shape and avoid injuries. Because golf is a sport that promotes muscular imbalance—most players swing the club only right-handed or left-handed—paddle boarding is a way to strengthen the muscles that get neglected.

"It can be an effective cross-training tool for golfers," says Golf Digest fitness advisor Ben Shear. "It's a diagonal movement pattern with many physical benefits that transfer well to golf. It improves posture and proprioception, core stability, muscular balance and endurance."

Gulbis says when she paddle boards, she'll often wear her Fitbit fitness-tracking band, and it tells her she's burning about 600 calories an hour on the water.

"I definitely got leaner the more I did it," she says. "But the thing I like best about it is that a lot of things I do to stay fit are tedious. But not paddle boarding. It's what I like to call 'fun fitness.'" —RON KASPRISKE

"I've had no back problems
since I began paddle boarding."





Play Nice

How to resolve any rules dispute amicably

Golf is a game rooted in polite behavior, but there are times when a disagreement over the rules creates an uncomfortable situation with an opponent or fellow-competitor. Unlike tour pros, you don't have the luxury of being followed around the course by a rules official who can quickly resolve a dispute. So in those times when a violation might have occurred but no official is handy to render a judgment, follow this step-by-step procedure to keep things civil.

—RON KASPRISKE

MATCH PLAY

1 DECIDE IF IT'S WORTH IT Although opponents can't agree to waive a rule, you can disregard a potential rules breach by an opponent. An example: You can't decide to ignore stroke-and-distance penalties for shots hit out-of-bounds. If you do, you're both disqualified. But if you see your opponent take an improper drop after hitting a shot O.B., it's your choice if you want to ignore the violation.

2 MAKE A CLAIM If you're troubled by something, let your opponent know — you think a rules violation might have occurred as soon as you're aware of it. That might be awkward, but it's important. You must do it before anyone in the match tees off on the next hole, or before all players leave the putting green of the last hole. The only time you can make a claim after that is if the facts of the situation weren't known at the time the hole was completed, and you had been given wrong information by your opponent.

3 CONTINUE THE MATCH Whatever the claim is about, once you've said your piece, you have to move on and complete the match. You can resolve the matter and adjust the results of the match after the round by checking the *Rules of Golf* or talking to the Committee.

STROKE PLAY

1 SEE SOMETHING? SAY SOMETHING It's good sportsmanship to let a fellow-competitor know a violation might have occurred before he or she makes another stroke. If there is disagreement or uncertainty about how to proceed, that golfer can finish the hole with two balls using two procedures. However, once that golfer has taken further action with the original ball, such as making another stroke, playing a second ball is no longer an option.

2 STEP ASIDE After informing a fellow-competitor that you think a violation has occurred, that person has to decide how to proceed. Assuming no further action was taken with the original ball, he or she can announce the intention to finish the hole with two balls and choose which one should count if the rules permit. Or the golfer can continue play the original ball in the manner he or she thinks is best.

3 FINISH THE ROUND The golfer who potentially committed the rules violation needs to alert the Committee of the dispute before turning in the scorecard or face disqualification. Regardless of whether two balls were played, a ruling needs to be made on what happened on that hole and which penalties might apply to that golfer's score.



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Matt Kuchar

THE OFFICIAL SHOE OF

Matt Kuchar
Pro Golfer

Smart Clothes

Bring a little science to your golf get-up

1

POLOTECH SHIRT

► A sensor on this snug T-shirt records fitness data such as heart rate, steps taken, calories burned. Monitor your vitals with an iPhone or iPad using PoloTech's app. It also tracks breathing depth and balance. If you wear it when you play, you can review how nervous or fatigued you were during key moments.

► \$295, ralphlauren.com

2



GYDE VEST

► Four battery-powered heating elements in the lining of the Calor vest can raise its temperature to 135 degrees. Perfect for winter golf. Just don't store a golf ball in its pockets after heating it (against the rules).

► \$300, gydesupply.com

3



PUMA GOLF SHOES

► The insoles of the Titanour Ignite are designed to help you walk 18 holes comfortably and to regulate temperature inside the shoe by absorbing, storing and releasing heat.

► \$160, puma.com

4



UNDER ARMOUR PULLOVER

► The Coldgear Infrared Fleece quarter-zip pullover helps you stay warm on chilly days without having to wear too many layers. Its coated lining wicks sweat and absorbs and retains body heat.

► \$70, underarmour.com

The PoloTech shirt's app lets you review fitness data such as effort, oxygen intake and breathing quality.



VEST: JEFFREY WESTBROOK • PULLOVER, SHOES: COURTESY OF COMPANIES



AM I NORMAL?

► I know I hit only two greens in regulation each round, but I insist on knowing every pin location. Is this pointless?

To quote Gordon Gekko of "Wall Street" fame, "The most valuable commodity I know of is information." We agree. Whether you are a good enough golfer to capitalize on the information should not deter you from obtaining it. Do you have any idea how many times Thomas Edison struck out on his ideas before he invented the light bulb? What's that? He didn't invent the light bulb? Never mind. Just remember that a prepared golfer is a dangerous golfer. Keep checking.

QUICK HITS

► **New Year's Resolution?** Order fewer hot dogs at the turn.

► **How many less?** At least one.

► **Chili?** We prefer it hot.



Submit your burning questions here: ask@golfdigest.com or on Twitter @GolfDigest



Q Do the pros warm up for tournaments using the same golf balls they play during a round or regular range balls?

ANDREW WYKURZ, METCALFE, ONTARIO

A

True story: Golf Digest used to own a range off the New Jersey Turnpike.

One day, a guy walks into the shop and asks for two buckets of range balls. The attendant says "That will be \$12." The guy hands over \$12, walks out of the shop, puts the buckets in a beat-up car and drives away. We bring this up because pros can pretty much do the same thing at every tour stop. Only they don't have to fork over \$12, the balls are new, and the car is made in Germany. No matter which ball a pro plays, there are bags of that make and model. These bags are usually found on a table by the range, and the pros can take as many as they want. They use their own balls when they practice putting, but they get those for free, too. If only we had it so good. Which reminds us, if you see a guy selling golf balls at a highway rest stop, would you give us a call?

I keep landing my shots short of my course's elevated greens despite using a range finder. What gives?

JAVIER RAMIREZ, LAREDO, TEXAS

►►►

First, we applaud your honesty. Most golfers blame coming up short on their caddie, partner, 7-iron, barometric pressure, global warming or President Obama. The reason lies in your question, says Rob Akins, Golf Digest teaching professional. "If you're using a range finder to get a yardage to an elevated green, keep in mind it's going to play longer than the yardage you get," Akins says. "When you hit into an elevated green, the ball doesn't stay in the air as long as it would hitting into a flat green, and that means it won't go as far." Next time, select at least one club longer than normal. Still short? Now you can blame Akins.

Who decides the colors of a course's stakes?

JIM GMUR, CENTRAL POINT, ORE.

►►►

The color of stakes and lines that define boundaries and hazard margins are determined by the *Rules of Golf* in its Definitions section. It's mandatory to use yellow to define water hazards and red for lateral water hazards, but any color can be used for defining out-of-bounds—though white is *de rigueur*. Frankly, we'd like to see something in tangerine tango or rich razzleberry. That being said, if you're wondering who decides where the stakes are placed, it's up to those in charge of the course. Although Mr. Johnson did have some influence on the addition of those white stakes near his petunia garden on No. 8.



LOVESTRUCK Do you have a story in which golf is the reason you met someone and fell in love?

Maybe the starter at your course serendipitously paired you, or you found yourselves next to each other at the range one night. If you have a romantic tale of love and golf, we'd like to hear it. Send a brief email to lovestruck@golfdigest.com, and you could be featured in a future issue.

"I still live with my parents, sleeping in my same old twin bed."

SMYLIE KAUFMAN

AGE 24

HOME BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

► Young players winning PGA Tour events has happened a lot lately. Five of the tour's six fall events of 2015 were won by first-time champs. Still, Kaufman's victory at the Shriners Hospitals for Children Open in October stands out. He shot a final-round 61 to win in only the second tournament of his rookie season. The graduate of LSU qualified for the PGA Tour by winning on the Web.com Tour earlier in 2015. —STEPHEN HENNESSEY

It's All Smiles

How could it not be when you're a tour winner at age 24?

► **SMYLIE ISN'T A NICKNAME.** It's my real name. And it has great meaning. My grandmother's cousin was Smylie Gebhart, an All-American defensive end for Georgia Tech in the 1970s. My dad and granddad used to stop by Smylie's house in Meridian, Miss., and my dad enjoyed his company so much, he gave me his name. Smylie died when I was 10. It's an honor to have him as my namesake.

► **MY LITTLE BROTHER IS LUCKIE.** That's a family name, too. I had Luckie caddie for me when I qualified for the 2014 U.S. Open. I missed the cut, but that experience was a game-changer. To see that most pros hit the ball similar to how I do, I realized I can hang with these guys.

► **THE MAGNITUDE OF WINNING** in the second PGA Tour event of my rookie year still hasn't hit me. I don't know what it was, but I was in a different mind-set that day. Nobody could get me out of that zone. I've never been the type of golfer to get scared once I get it going. I'm an aggressive player, and I thrive in those situations.

► **GROWING UP,** some kids called me Frownie because when things don't go my way, Frownie comes out. I'm a super-competitive dude and always want to win. I try to not let people see him.

► **NOT EVERY PRO GOLFER** lives with his parents. I'm keeping it simple. The biggest perk? My mom still does my laundry.

► **MY STORY IS DIFFERENT** from most young guys out here. A lot of them, like Jordan Spieth or Justin Thomas, have been good forever. They've never gone through a tough patch. I've been the opposite. I struggled to be consistent in college [LSU], but then I figured it out my senior year. My swing was always pretty, but I've simplified it with swing coach Tony Ruggiero. Now, I can pull off any shot.

► **I MET MY GIRLFRIEND** in high-school chemistry. You can say it was real chemistry—we've been going out ever since. She was a cheerleader at Auburn, so whenever LSU and Auburn played each other, it was fun. My parents played golf for LSU, so I've been a lifelong fan.

► **HOW MUCH DO I LOVE** LSU football? This past fall, my formula was to try to barely make the cut so I could play early on Saturday and finish in time to watch their games. Every time that happened, I played well in the third round—including when I won. So my strategy worked out.

If I don't seek your advice, then I don't want it.



Undercover Tour Pro

Bad advice and meddling on the range

The other day a friend asked, "What's the worst advice you've ever received?" The question really stumped me.

Every week I get unsolicited advice out here. People I don't know have come up to me at the practice green to make a comment about my stance. I've listened to caddies for other players openly debate my alignment. On the PGA Tour, it's tough to practice on a Tuesday because everybody and his brother wants to help you.

I've won once out here. It took me years. A lot of people

say they're surprised I haven't won more, but maybe they're just my friends.

It doesn't matter how many cuts in a row I've missed. If I don't seek your advice, then I don't want it. Sometimes I'll even move to the far end of the range to send the message. Not that it works. In all seriousness, I wish the tour would cut back access to the range.

To be fair, a lot of the equipment reps out here played professionally at some level, and so they're somewhat qualified to analyze a golf swing. I know they're genuinely trying to help, so when a rep flips his credential off his belly and starts pantomiming swing positions, expect-

ing me to pay attention, I try not to be rude. I stand there for a bit.

As for teachers, I get that they're trying to find work. Most are very courteous. They won't break down your swing right then and there. They'll kiss your butt a little before giving you their phone number and saying, "Hey, I think I could really help you out."

Psychologists are the biggest joke out here. If I see a player with a psychologist, I automatically think that player is weak-minded. The shrinks are full of it, but they don't bother anyone. They let players pursue them. Any good teacher knows just as much as a psychologist. Butch Harmon tells his students they should beat the best, and they all believe it.

Physical trainers are the most aggressive, without a doubt. A few have been known to really chase players. It seems

like the magic number for these guys is five. If a trainer can get work with five players, two or three will probably be in the field at any given tournament, and that's enough to justify the hotel and airfare.

All the staffers in the PGA Tour fitness trailer are certified, but now and again we'll get random muscleheads hanging around, crowing they know the secret. I had a buddy whose new trainer put him through a really strenuous workout on a Wednesday, and he was so sore the next morning he had to withdraw from the tournament. I've also seen these independent trainers hang around our fitness trailer to see how the staff is treating us, and then just copy the regimens.

Don't get me wrong—most trainers are great. My guy at home is also my nutritionist. He's encouraged me to grocery shop on the road. The meals we get each week at the clubhouse and various sponsor dinners are tasty, and it's hard turning down free and easy, but restaurant cuisine does tend to push rich and memorable. This season, I've eaten simpler, and I've definitely noticed a difference in my energy level, particularly at the end of playing several weeks in a row.

Most of my fitness routine is stretching, but I also do some weights. Got to keep up with the young bucks, or at least be long enough to contend on the shorter courses.

I think it's funny how the golfers who are injured the most are usually the young, good-looking ones. Maybe they should listen to Steve Pate, who once told me, "You can't pull fat, you can only pull muscle."

Not enough people appreciate Vijay Singh. He was the first golfer to figure out that if you were highly abrasive, you could reclaim the range as your office. Swing coaches, caddies, trainers, reps—pretty much everyone stopped approaching Vijay because they knew they were going to get told to go f--- themselves.

—WITH MAX ADLER



A TrackMan 4: Uses two Doppler radars: one for the clubhead, one for the ball

B FlightScope x2 Elite: Enhanced radar, super-slow-motion camera feature

C Foresight GC2/HMT: Camera system captures 10,000 frames per second

TRACKMAN



Prepare to Launch

What you need to know before having your swing analyzed

1 That square-ish device that spits out numbers every time you hit a ball in the fitting bay at your friendly neighborhood golf megastore has mesmerized clubfitters, retailers and even golf instructors for the past decade. Despite the price (generally \$10,000 to \$20,000, though some consumer models are just \$2,000), the monitors have become more common than bowls of peanuts in the grillroom. But just like that bowl of nuts, sometimes a launch monitor might leave you with a handful of something you didn't want. Don't get us wrong—it's a terrific tool if operated correctly. But before you have your swing "monitored," here are a few things to consider:

1 KNOW YOUR BALL SPEED, LAUNCH ANGLE AND BACKSPIN

► Most devices track dozens of ball-flight and swing characteristics, but these are three

that are critical. And ball speed should dictate the other two, particularly when we're talking about drivers. If your ball speed is low (less than 120 miles per hour), focus on launch angle. Find clubs and a golf swing that get you launching the ball higher for more distance. Higher than 12 degrees is a good start. Conversely, if you swing fast and hit it dead center, focus on spin rate. Getting that lower (less than 3,000 revolutions per minute) could mean 10 to 20 yards. If you want to go to the next level

with your data tracking, pay attention to things like "angle of attack" and "angle of descent." The former is the angle the club comes into the ball. You want it to be a positive number for your driver to help shots launch high with less spin for more distance. Angle of descent is the angle that the ball lands. A shot landing too steeply will have less roll than one hit on a flatter trajectory. A good angle of descent for a driver is less than 40 degrees.

2 CONSISTENCY MATTERS MOST

► Launch monitors are ridiculously specific in the numbers they produce—you're not. Even so, resist the urge to buy the driver that produces the most distance or the best numbers on one shot. Nor should you trust a clubfitter who focuses only on that one hit. Instead, go with the driver that produces the most consistent—and satisfactory—data. Many launch monitors

can track impact location or whether your clubface is square to the target, so if the numbers show that you're hitting the ball consistently solid, you've found a club you'll love as much as any new car you've ever bought.

3 DON'T RUSH THROUGH THE PROCESS

► Not everyone charges for a launch-monitor fitting, and some sessions can be as much as \$300. Our advice is to worry less about the cost and more about how it's done. Before forking over a credit card, talk to the fitter about the process. You want a session that includes an interview about your tendencies and desires, allows you to test a variety of models and brands, and affords you the opportunity to dial in specific loft and shaft options. Also, make sure you're hitting quality golf balls, not beat-up range rocks. A legit ball will give a more valid read on spin and launch angle.

—MIKE STACHURA

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PLAY
+
STAY

KEY WEST

Warned by ocean currents in winter and cooled by sea breezes in summer, Key West on the southern tip of Florida is continental America's year-round Caribbean vacation destination.

The historic Key West Golf Club championship course was originally built in 1923 and redesigned by renowned architect Rees Jones in 1982. Expertly maintained ever since, the tee boxes, fairways and greens on the 6,500-yard layout have been resurfaced in the last two years with smooth-rolling, salt-tolerant paspalum grass. Set on 200 tropical acres with an abundance of wildlife, Key West Golf Club welcomes golf groups and traveling couples, who find convenient accommodations at the Marriott Beachside, Casa Marina and Southernmost Hotel Collection.

Key West itself may be a small town, but it offers an incredible diversity of big-fun activities. Water sports include world-class fishing, diving and snorkeling. Cultural attractions range from museums and historic sites to art galleries, theatrical performances and music concerts. Relax at a spa, feast on fresh seafood from the local waters and enjoy a romantic sunset cruise, then head out for a night of refreshment at one of the famous nightspots along Duval Street.



Bahia Honda State Park is a year-round beach lover's destination in the Florida Keys.

The 120-mile Overseas Highway that connects the Keys to the mainland is an awesome drive, but for vacationers who can't wait to get there, several major carriers now offer non-stop flights directly to Key West from New York, Charlotte, Atlanta and Washington, D.C. For more information, go to Fla-Keys.com or call 800-352-5397.



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the grass.

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If you want to experience a game of golf designed to keep you on your toes, try a barefoot round at the Rees Jones 18-hole course at Key West Golf Club.

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The World Golf Village Resort in historic St. Augustine.

FLORIDA'S FIRST COAST OF GOLF

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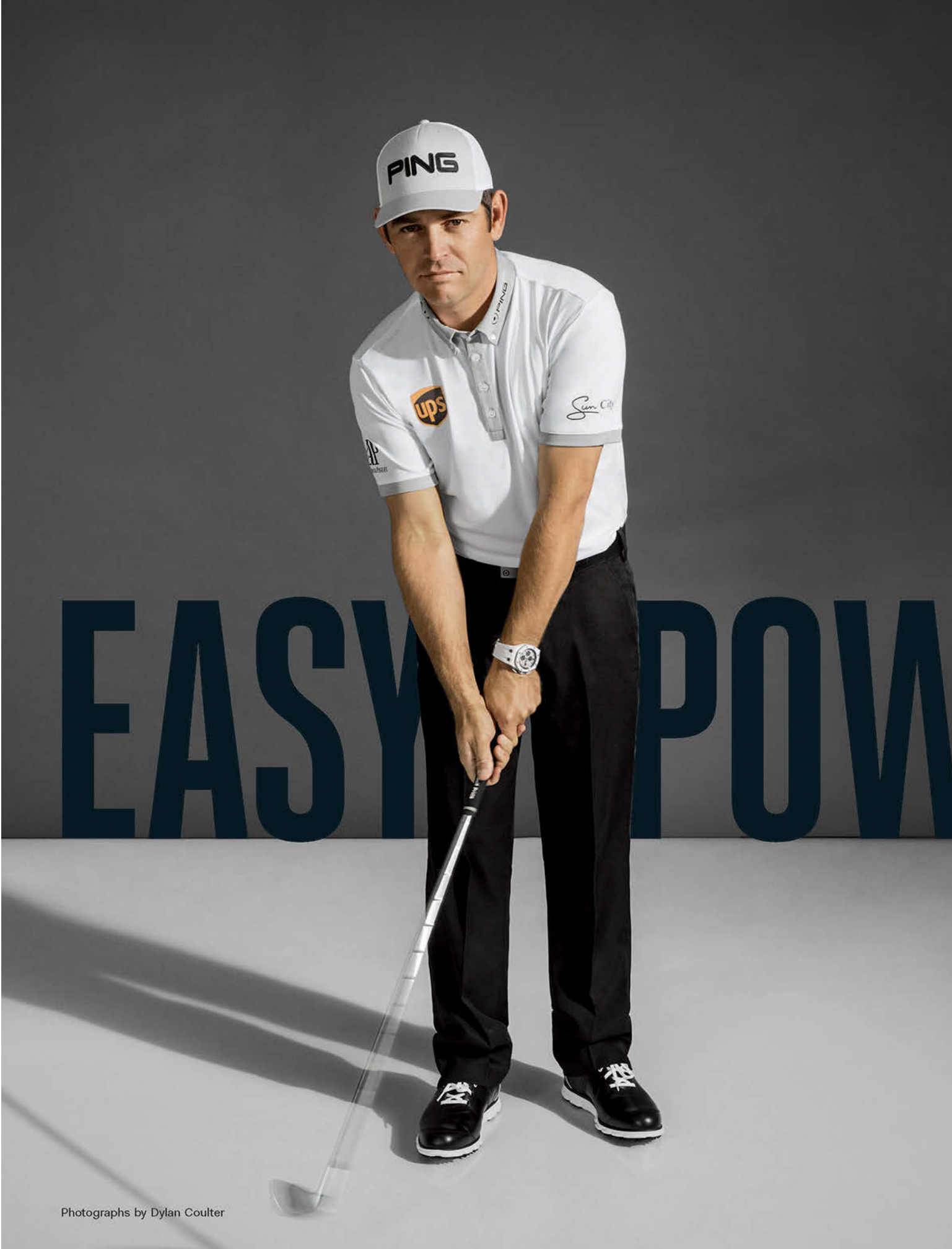
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BY LOUIS OOSTHUIZEN

I was never the biggest or strongest guy growing up on the southern cape of South Africa, so from the beginning I knew I was going to have to create clubhead speed with good fundamentals and efficient technique. So those are things I've always paid attention to. At 5-11, 160 pounds, I'm still on the smaller side for a tour player, but I can carry my driver almost 300 yards and hit my 7-iron 180, and that's using what I would call a comfortable swing. Rory McIlroy hits it even longer, and he's about the same size I am. Watch a sport like rugby or basketball, and the pitch or court is filled with guys who are huge and super fast, and they're doing things you can't even try to copy. But golf is different. All golfers can improve in the basics and find more "easy power"—the kind that comes from good rhythm, stability and the right sequence of motion, not by going after the ball as hard as you can with brute force. Here I'll show you some of the things I work on to keep my swing in balance and working at optimum speed. —WITH MATTHEW RUDY

HOW YOU CAN CREATE MORE SPEED WITH LESS EFFORT

VER

GOING BACK

KEEP YOUR
ARMS SOFT
AND MAKE
A FULL HINGE
TO THE TOP.



A lot of players mess around with their grips to get more speed, but they stop there. The grip is important, but it's more important to have your arms relaxed when you start, centered under your chest and positioned with the elbows pointing down. Then you can turn back with your right arm close to your body and make an easy, full wrist hinge to the top instead of fighting yourself. Try to make a big shoulder turn, keeping your feet quiet, and feel your right hip rotate behind you during the backswing.

COMING DOWN

START YOUR
HIPS FIRST
AND LET THEM
PULL YOUR
UPPER BODY.



Clubhead speed is measured at the ball, but most players have already lost it halfway down. They try to make the club go fast from the top, rather than giving everything time to unwind. Feel like you're throwing the club underhanded as far and high as you can down the range, not like you're chopping an ax into the ball. The hips should start first and pull the upper body, which gives the club a free swing through. When you re-route the club from the top, trying to force it down, you sacrifice swing speed.

INTO IMPACT

PUSH AGAINST
THE GROUND
KEEPING YOUR
FEET FLAT.



As you swing down to the ball, imagine a set of dominos getting tipped over. If you push one domino out of sequence, the whole row won't fall. A lot of players go hard at the target with the body or come through early with the shoulders, instead of turning the hips out of the way first. That's like pulling out a couple of dominos and breaking the chain. Push against the ground with your feet flat, continue rotating your hips forward, and feel like your chest doesn't get back to square until you reach impact.

TO THE FINISH

LET THE CLUB
SPEED THROUGH
WITHOUT
FORCING IT.



The only swing thoughts I have during my best rounds are some form of *let it go*. I'm not focused on my body when I play, just where I want to hit the ball. Work on these moves in practice, one by one, so you can eventually play without thinking about them. Ironically, the more you try to consciously direct the club into specific positions, rather than letting it react to your body movements, the slower and less predictably it will swing. Remember, you're trying to find power without forceful effort.

LOUIS OOSTHUIZEN has won seven times on the European Tour, including the 2010 Open Championship. At the end of 2015, he was No. 17 in the World Golf Ranking.



Photographs by J.D. Cuban



SHORT GAME SAVVY

BY BUTCH HARMON / GOLF DIGEST TEACHING PROFESSIONAL

HOW TO ADJUST WHEN YOU GET THOSE ODDBALL SHOTS

...

Every golfer loves standing in the fairway with a perfect 7-iron yardage, ready to make a stock swing and stick it next to the pin. But when you get around the greens, circumstances often force you to create a particular kind of shot. Sometimes the issue is a difficult lie, or an obstacle in front of you, or a tricky hole location—even the pressure of your score or the outcome of the match. You have to make quick adjustments to your standard short-game technique to handle the added challenge. Here we'll look at a few specialty shots that can save you in a pinch. —WITH PETER MORRICE



BUNKER PLAY

YOU'RE UNDER THE LIP

...

Here your standard bunker shot won't get the ball up fast enough to clear the bank in front of you. To hit a higher shot, you need to add loft to the clubface. Open the face significantly, then take your grip and play the ball way forward in your stance, opposite your front foot. At address, drop your hands back a few inches so they're behind the ball—that will add loft and help the clubhead slide through the sand. As you swing back, turn the face more open by cupping your left wrist, feeling the toe of the club rolling to your right so it points behind you (*left*). From there, focus on slapping the sand a few inches behind the ball, with the clubhead skimming, not digging. You'll pop the ball up and drop it softly on the green.

CHIPPING

THE PIN IS WAY BACK

...

The common mistake here is using the club you usually chip with—often a wedge—and trying to carry the ball deeper into the green. That requires a longer, harder swing, which makes the shot tougher. Instead, try the hook chip with a 7- or 8-iron. Set up with your weight favoring your front foot and the ball off your rear foot. Take the club back to the inside and swing the toe over through impact, closing the face (*right*). You'll create more run on the ball by adding hook spin. You don't have to make a longer swing to hit a longer shot.

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**WITH THE BALL
SITTING DOWN,
PICK THE CLUB
STRAIGHT UP.**

PITCHING

THE BALL IS BURIED

...

Not only do you have to play a soft shot to the green, now you have to do it from a buried lie. First, realize you're not going to hit the ball cleanly—you have to chunk it a bit to get out of the thick grass. Take your most lofted wedge, open the clubface, and play the ball about middle. Set more weight on your front foot, and grip the club a little firmer in your left hand. Your goal is to swing down through the shot without the toe of the clubhead passing the heel. If the toe passes, the heavy grass will grab the clubhead, and you'll

dump it short. To minimize how much grass you catch, pick the club straight up on the backswing (above). Then feel as if you're sticking the heel of the club into the ground. Remember, keep that left hand firm, and make sure the heel gets to the ball first.

PUTTING

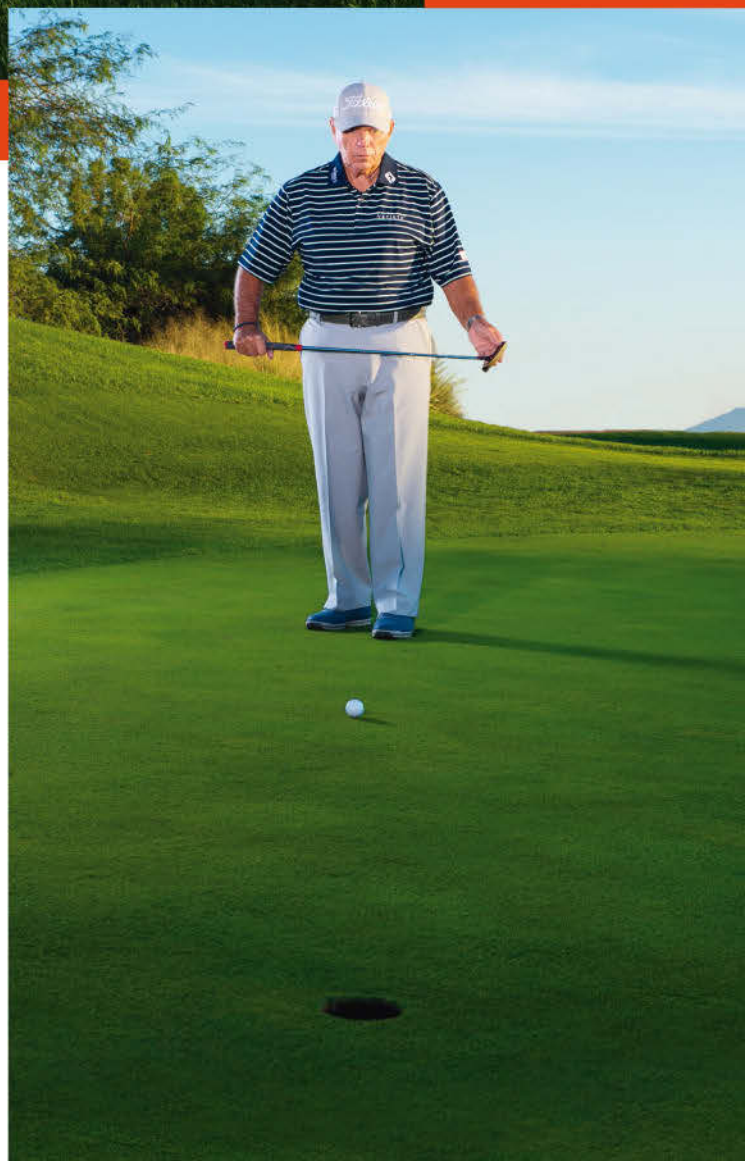
YOU NEED TO MAKE IT

...

So far we've been talking about adjustments. But in this case, don't change anything. When golfers have to make a putt, they slow down. But they're only icing themselves, like when a coach calls timeout to delay a big free throw. Pressure mounts with more

time. The grip gets tight, the stroke gets jerky—the rest you know. If your routine is one practice stroke, don't make three. If you usually take two looks at the hole, stick with that. And as for reading the putt, your first read is usually best. Once you get over the ball, it's total commitment: Pick your line (right), follow your routine and pull the trigger. To make sure your head stays still, listen for the ball to drop with your left ear. You'll like what you hear.

BUTCH HARMON, ranked No. 1 on Golf Digest's 50 Best Teachers in America, works with Rickie Fowler, Dustin Johnson, Jimmy Walker, Brandt Snedeker and Natalie Gulbis.



AFTER ALL THE

HURT, A HEALTHY PAUSE

THE TIGER OF OLD IS DONE,
BUT A NEW VERSION
COULD BRING A DIFFERENT KIND
OF SATISFACTION

BY JAIME DIAZ

Three weeks before his 40th birthday in December, Tiger Woods did something he should have done a long time ago: He publicly stepped away from golf. Truly stepped away, with no stated expectations for when—or if—he might return. It placed before him an undetermined period free of scrutiny and judgment, something he has probably longed for since he started racking up age-group titles as a junior.

The decision was accompanied by a rare openness. At his pre-tournament press conference at the Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas, where he was the host, and two

days later in the release of a wide-ranging interview with Time magazine, Woods showed vulnerability, a quality he has always implicitly denied that he even possesses.

Rather than defiant optimism, Woods was fatalistic. “I’ve reconciled myself to it,” he said of the real possibility that he might never play tournament golf again. At the press conference, two statements in particular stunned the room. “Where is the light at the end of the tunnel? I don’t know.” And: “I think pretty much everything beyond this will be gravy.”

Upon first airing, these words and others were a sad acknowledgement of the end, a de facto retirement speech. Nerve damage in his lower back, first requiring surgery in March 2014 before two more procedures to the same spot within six weeks late last year, left him unable to even know when he could begin rehabilitation. It’s likely 2016 ends up a competitive washout.

Yet amid all the gloom, I sensed Woods was relieved. Finally, he was letting go of the immense burden of being golf’s Superman. He immediately seemed lighter, but not because his playing career is over. Woods never said he was quitting. Rather, for who knows how long, he is pausing. “With all my heart,” he told veteran golf journalist Lorne Rubenstein in the Time interview, “I do not want to stop playing golf.”

If he is able to compete again, Woods won’t be in a rush—a first. Restless fury fueled his domination at every level of his career. It also led him to take on risky swing changes, to adopt a joint-jarring Navy SEAL-style exercise regimen that trainers warned

him against, and to return to competition after injuries sooner than physicians advised.

He conceded the cost of at least some of that behavior. Coming back from surgeries too quickly probably “made injuries worse.” His epic victory at the 2008 U.S. Open came two months after cartilage was cleaned out of a knee with a torn ACL. After a procedure on his meniscus in December 2002, he would play (and win) at Torrey Pines two months later. Many around him believe Woods’ return to competition at the 2010 Masters was too soon after his public humiliation began on Thanksgiving 2009. He even seemed to rush back in 2014 from his first microdiscectomy, only to play poorly. Graham DeLaet, who has had the same procedure, says it took him almost a year to feel close to recovered.

Perhaps acknowledging the pattern and its toll have been the reason for Woods downshifting his old persona and becoming more human over the past year. He hugged people at last year’s Masters, gladly offered mentoring to a hesitant-to-ask Jason Day, and made it known he would invite being asked to serve in the almost comically subordinate role of Ryder Cup assistant captain.

In the Bahamas, Woods was amiable, never bristly. In the Time interview, he addressed some past mistakes, his relationship with ex-wife Elin, and why he and Lindsey Vonn broke up. His main theme was that his role as a parent to his two young children is far more important than his golf.

Amid such relative candor, it seems the trickiest subject for Woods is his legacy. Eagerly comparing himself to team-sports contemporaries Kobe Bryant, Derek Jeter and



Peyton Manning, all of whom have a shorter window than a golfer, was a way of saying he, too, had left it all out there nobly, only to see his gift worn away by injury. It's a preferable narrative than being the singularly gifted "chosen one" on track to be the greatest golfer of all time—perhaps the greatest athlete ever—who self-destructed.

To the inevitable question about catching Jack Nicklaus' 18 professional major victories, Woods offered this cherry-picked self-assessment: "I've passed Jack on the all-time win list [79 to 73], just shy of Sam [Snead, 82]," he said. "I passed Sam basically a decade ago in major championships, but I'm still shy of Jack's. So I've had a pretty good career for my 20s and 30s. For my 20 years out here, I think I've achieved a lot, and if that's all it entails, then I've had a pretty good run." He added, "I've done a lot more in the game than I ever thought I could."

The downsizing doesn't ring true. Catchphrases like "let the legend grow," "second place sucks," "first loser" and "never settle" all came from a belief in his competitive superiority. It never looked like cockiness as Woods was winning 14 majors by the age of 32, a run so colossal it seemed to make him a one-man human-potential movement, never mind a lock to overtake Nicklaus. It's hard to believe Woods would accept falling short so matter-of-factly.

Perhaps Woods' response was calculated to set him up as a more likable hero in a comeback. Humility always becomes an aging star.

Then again, we might have underestimated the weight of being the chaser in the most celebrated extended pursuit in sports history. More than a hint was provided by Hank Haney in *The Big Miss*, in which

IF HIS BACK RESPONDS, WHO COULD SAY THAT WOODS IN HIS EARLY OR EVEN MID-40S COULDN'T BE A FORCE AGAIN?

Woods' former teacher recounted a 2007 exchange after Haney had become exasperated with his player's increasing involvement in physically punishing training. Haney: "Man, what are you doing? Are you out of your mind? What about Nicklaus' record? Don't you care about that?" Woods: "No. I'm satisfied with what I've done in my career."

Comparisons with Nicklaus brought glory, but they also carried intense questioning and pressure. Woods has always been perceived as welcoming pressure—his record as a closer is where he has put the most separation between himself and the other greats of the game. But in his post-scandal years, he has played tight on weekends at majors, and in the past year he experienced a shocking bout of the chipping yips and a flurry of the highest 18-hole scores of his career.

Professing satisfaction with his record allows Woods the view that he didn't lose a battle he never really fought. Woods correctly reminded us that the list he hung over his bed as a kid was not of Nicklaus' majors, as was commonly believed, but instead one that compiled Nicklaus' ages when he achieved certain early milestones, ending with victory in his first major championship. Woods' goal, he told Rubenstein, was to reach the same accomplishments at a younger age. And then, in a phrase whose repetition indicates just how much he competed with Nicklaus, Woods said, "I beat them all. I beat them all."

Presuming that Woods can go forward competitively, freeing himself from Nicklaus comparisons, allows the possibility of an extended free run. At the same moment that there's plenty of evidence that Woods' time is over, he has nothing but time.

The long road is the biggest advantage professional golfers have over other athletes. Woods, meanwhile, can credibly cite the post-40 feats of Vijay Singh and, yes, Nicklaus' victory at 46 at the 1986 Masters.

Woods' sabbatical not only gives the best chance for his back to heal, but time (and presumably, reflection) give him an even better chance to heal psychologically. The most haunting thing that he said in the Time interview was this: "I would have to say, probably, my only peace has been in between the ropes and hitting the shots." As he must know, any peace that he finds in life would help him as a golfer.

Of course, if Woods' back never responds, all bets are off. But if it does, who could say that Woods in his early or even mid-40s couldn't be a force again?

What style of golfer would a relatively healthy Woods coming back in 2018 or thereabouts have to be to have success? He'd have to finally surrender the ego and fun that comes from using superior power and distance as a main weapon. It would mean focusing on being straighter and more precise with a swing that takes less of a physical toll, and placing more emphasis on short-game and putting excellence. A preview of that game was on display in Woods' victory at the 2013 Players. It would often put him at a disadvantage in regular tournaments but raise his chances in majors.

A bigger question is whether he still possesses the desire required for even a late-career version of greatness. He insists he does, but close observers have seen a drop in his work ethic, which has led to a commensurate drop in his joy for playing. No doubt injuries have bred discouragement, but Woods has always maintained that the moment he believes he is no longer capable of winning, "I'll rack the cue."

He is not there yet, though he's definitely in new territory. But not completely foreign. Woods was in an eerily similar position at the most dramatic point of his career, the weeks before his victory at the 2008 U.S. Open. As Haney recounted, "For one of the few times in his career, he wasn't facing crazy expectations. Because he was injured, the pressure to win was largely off, and he basically had a free run. It gave him the perfect attitude: highly motivated, but with little to lose. . . . At Torrey Pines, more than anywhere else, Tiger was the model student."

Since then, life has presumably taught Woods a lot. If he has been a good student, perhaps he can have that perfect attitude again. He's hurt, he's in limbo, he might even be done. But at the moment, the course he has embarked on finally seems healthy. **G**



GREAT MOMENTS IN (AGING) GOLF

Tiger Woods turned 40 on Dec. 30. Significant achievements by golfers late in their careers:

OLDEST TO WIN ...

The Masters

Jack Nicklaus, 46 (1986).
Ben Crenshaw, 43 (1995).

U.S. Open

Hale Irwin, 45 (1990).
Raymond Floyd, 43 (1986).
Ted Ray, 43 (1920).

Open Championship

Old Tom Morris, 46 (1867).
Roberto De Vincenzo, 44 (1967).
Harry Vardon, 44 (1914).
Old Tom Morris, 43 (1864).
Phil Mickelson, 43 (2013).
Darren Clarke, 42 (2011).
Ernie Els, 42 (2012).
J.H. Taylor, 42 (1913).
Willie Park Sr., 42 (1875).
Tom Watson was 59 in 2009 when he lost a playoff to **Stewart Cink**, and **Greg Norman** was 53 in 2008 when he led after three rounds.

PGA Championship

Julius Boros, 48 (1968).
Lee Trevino, 44 (1984).
Sam Snead was 62 when he finished T-3 in 1974.

Ryder Cup

Raymond Floyd, 51 (1993).

PGA Tour event

Sam Snead, 52 (1965 Greater Greensboro Open).
Art Wall, 51 (1975 Greater Milwaukee Open).
Davis Love III, 51 (2015 Wyndham Championship).

European Tour event

Miguel Angel Jimenez, 50 (2014).
Jimenez, 49 (2014).
Jimenez, 48 (2012).



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4 CHECKPOINTS TO HIT SOLID IRONS EVERY DAY

BY RICKIE FOWLER
GOLF DIGEST PLAYING EDITOR

FOUR

O

On tournament days, I'm already warmed up when I arrive at the course. No matter how early my tee time, I'll get to the gym and break a sweat first. That way, I'm ready to go so those first swings at the range aren't lazy ones to get loose.

Right from the start, I'm trying to hit each ball solid and hear that flush sound with my irons. If I'm not hearing it, I don't panic. I can usually figure out what's happening with my swing by going through these checkpoints.

1

Are my feet, knees, hips and shoulders square?
Sometimes I ask my caddie, Skovy [Joe Skovron], but you can get a good idea by looking down. You should perceive a bunch of parallel lines pointing just left of your target.

2

How's my posture?
Now and again I get too bent over, with my head low. The fix is to stand taller and look up a bit. I like how my neck looks long in this photo. My torso has plenty of room to rotate under it.

3

Am I overswinging?
Nothing ruins your timing like bringing the club back too far and too fast. To keep my backswing nice and compact, I try to feel width—that my hands are far away from my body. Wide swings also tend to be shorter and smoother.

4

Am I making ball-first contact?
I know I am on this shot because my feet are rolling forward. Getting to your front side helps you hit the ball first.

I know what you're thinking: *Just four things, Rick? Way more than that can go wrong in my swing.* That might be so, but alignment, posture, swing length and contact will take care of a lot. If you can get your body primed and then cover those checkpoints, you'll flush it more often.

And if you hit your first couple shots great, don't bother with the checkpoints. In golf, the fewer thoughts, the better.

—WITH MAX ADLER



TOUR SAUCE Don't you hate when this happens: You rip a drive down the middle and end up in a divot? Better players need to know how to hit this shot on the green. If the divot is bare earth, the key is to swing down more steeply to ensure ball-first contact. Play the ball back, lean to your front side, and go down and get it. If the divot has been filled with sand, you can afford to be more shallow through impact, like a normal swing. In either case, you don't have to club down. Make an aggressive swing, and the ball will fly its usual distance with any iron.

• PUMA shirt, \$75, pants, \$80, belt, \$45, shoes, \$180, hat, \$26 • TITLEIST glove, \$24



DROP

MORE



GOOD PUTTERS ARE GOOD PRACTICERS. HERE'S HOW TO BECOME ONE. BY DARREN MAY

PUTTS

Two characteristics distinguish how top tour players approach putting: (1) They pay careful attention that the putter is aligned correctly and that it contacts the ball with maximum energy—a direct hit, not a glancing blow—to produce consistent roll; (2) they replicate on-course pressure when they practice, called full-process training, to learn to make putts when it matters. Average golfers typically do neither.

To make your practice more effective, try a system I developed called Every Ball Counts that targets stroke mechanics and practice simulations. First, let's discuss what I'm showing in the photograph here. This is a drill I have my tour players do. Find a hole on a fairly flat section of the practice green, and plant tees in the ground in four lines, forming a giant plus sign. Start at four feet from the hole and continue out in one-foot increments until you place five tees in each line, from four to eight feet. That's 20 tees in all.

Drop a ball next to one of the four-foot tees, and try to hole the putt. If you make it, tap the tee halfway down. If you miss, leave the tee up. Go to another four-footer, and repeat. Putt all the four-footers first, then all the five-footers, and so on, until you've hit putts from every tee. You'll feel the pressure building. When you finish, count the tees still at full height and subtract from 20. That's your score.

Do this drill four or five times to get your average score. The average of my tour players is 14 out of 20; players who shoot in the 90s average about 10. Keep track of your score each time, and write it down to chart your improvement. Now turn the page, and we'll work on your stroke mechanics.

—WITH ROGER SCHIFFMAN

GROOVE YOUR STROKE, THEN PUT IT TO THE

Let's get your putter on the correct path to roll the ball on line. For starters, understand that your through-stroke will be slightly shorter than your backstroke if you apply maximum speed at impact. In other words, the strike will slow down the putterhead.

In terms of alignment, most golfers aim to the right and cut across their putts from out to in. This is a glancing blow and doesn't propel the ball forward efficiently. Just like in the full swing, you're

trying to produce energy with minimal effort. You do that with a solid strike and a square putterface.

Given the common tendency to cut across putts, most average golfers need to feel as if they're hitting draws with their putter, swinging the putterhead in to out. In reality, the putter will track from slightly inside the line to straight along the line through impact.

Lay two alignment rods on the green just wider than your putterhead and parallel with each other, aimed at a hole six feet away (*shown*). Place them so the front end of the outside rod is even with the ball and the back end of the inside rod is even with the ball. This allows for an in-to-out stroke path. Hit some putts from this practice station, being careful not to

bump into either alignment rod. You'll groove an inside-to-straight stroke, just like the pros.

Take your time and be precise with this drill and the one on the previous page. Remember the name of my system: Every Ball Counts. Groove your stroke here and then test it using the 20-ball drill. This organized, measurable approach encourages skill transfer from the practice green to the course. Put in some effort, and I know you'll drop more putts.

WHAT'S YOUR STYLE?

As I said above, most golfers cut across their putts. But some have the opposite problem, swinging the putter too much on an in-to-out path. If this is your issue, you need to reverse the positions of the alignment rods in this drill. To see which path you have, set two balls against your putterface—one on the toe and the other on the heel. Hit both balls with one stroke. If the inside ball (heel) gets to the hole first, you have a cut stroke. If the outside ball (toe) gets there first, you have a hook stroke. Set up your practice station accordingly.

TEST. THAT'S WHAT THE BEST PUTTERS DO.



DARREN MAY
is director of
instruction at
The Bear's Club
in Jupiter, Fla.,
and works with
Camilo Villegas
and Cameron
Tringale.



Ham and Greenbacks



When the legacy of Tiger Woods is determined, his most important impact might well be the better athletes he attracted to golf. Woods did that in two ways: He made the game cool, and he made it possible to get rich—really rich—by playing golf.

August will be the 20th anniversary of Woods' pro debut, and in those two decades talented and compellingly athletic young people have chosen golf over other sports. The results can be seen on leader boards every week.

WOODS SLIPS

FROM THE NO. 1 SPOT

ON THE

GOLF DIGEST 50

MONEY LIST

FOR THE FIRST TIME,

BUT YOUNG

STARS SCOOP UP

THE EXTRA CASH

BY RON SIRAK

THE BANK OF TIGER PAYS DIVIDENDS

The Tiger Babies are here, and they are taking over.

For the first time in the 13 years of the Golf Digest 50 all-encompassing money list, Woods is not No. 1. That honor goes to Jordan Spieth, who is 22 years old and was 3 when Tiger won his first professional major championship, the 1997 Masters. Spieth earned more than

\$53 million on and off the course (*see chart*) to lead the GD50. At more than \$48.5 million, Woods fell to No. 3, behind 45-year-old Phil Mickelson and ahead of Rory McIlroy, 26. Arnold Palmer, golf's most enduring cash machine at 86, is No. 5.

Don't feel sorry for Tiger: During his career, he has earned more than \$1.4 *billion*—with a B.



The change at the top of the GD50 reflects new talent and new ways of marketing that talent. Instead of Woods as the clear No. 1 and Mickelson the perpetual 1-A, a Big Four has emerged, connecting with their fans by taking to social media and digital platforms in addition to traditional advertising and media outlets. The arrival of the Big Four of Spieth, McIlroy, Jason Day (No. 7 at age 28) and Rickie Fowler (No. 8 at 27) could not be more fortuitous.

"With Tiger and Phil deep into the back nine, this young group came along at just the right time," says John Mascatello of Wasserman Media Group, which represents Day and Fowler.

"You can never rule out anything with Tiger because he is just an incredible athlete," Mascatello says, "but because you no longer have to rest on any one person's shoulder, I think the game is well positioned."

Because of Woods, who also brought a focus on fitness, pro golfers are bigger, younger, stronger, better, more confident and richer than ever before.

In addition to the Big Four, this year's GD50 includes No. 22 Hideki Matsuyama, No. 34 Ryo Ishikawa, No. 36 Patrick Reed, No. 46 Danny Lee, No. 47 Lydia Ko, No. 48 Sangmoon Bae and No. 50 Paula Creamer. All are in their 20s—except Ko, who is

just 18. Poised to possibly move into the GD50 next year are players like Justin Thomas and Daniel Berger, both 22; Inbee Park, 27; and Robert Streb, 28.

"There is no question professional golf is as healthy as it's been in my 25 years in the game, both from an entertainment point of view and a commercial point of view," says Clarke Jones, managing director of the Americas for IMG, which has Ko, Matsuyama and Creamer among its clients, along with Palmer.

Think of it: Day was 9 when Woods won that 1997 Masters, McIlroy was 7 and Ko was born 11 days after Tiger slipped on his first of four green jackets.

The depth of talent in men's golf was demonstrated last summer when McIlroy missed time with an ankle injury.

"When Rory got hurt, instead of the PGA Championship and the [FedEx Cup] Playoffs being uninteresting, Jason won two of the playoff events [plus the PGA], Rickie one and Spieth the other," Mascatello says. "The No. 1 player couldn't play for six weeks, and there was more attention to the game than ever. It's like having depth on your roster in winning a Super Bowl."

That was not always the case when Woods was at the top and fan interest tended to wane when he was injured or playing

GOLFDIGEST50

ON-COURSE INCOME for 2015 includes all money earned on the PGA Tour and the five international tours (Japan PGA, PGA European, Australasian, Southern Africa, Asian) and the Champions Tour, LPGA Tour, Ladies European Tour and the Japan LPGA through Nov. 22. It includes unofficial money won in nontour events.

OFF-COURSE INCOME includes estimates of all money earned from endorsements, bonuses, appearance fees, corporate outings, speaking engagements, licensing fees (video games, trading cards, etc.), course architecture, books, instructional videos and businesses that capitalize on a person's status as a player, such as product lines including clothing, wine and turfgrass. Investment income is not included.

| NAME | PREVIOUS RANK | ON COURSE | OFF COURSE | TOTAL |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Jordan Spieth | 16 | \$23,030,465 | \$30,000,000 | \$53,030,465 |
| 2. Phil Mickelson | 2 | \$2,301,730 | \$50,000,000 | \$52,301,730 |
| 3. Tiger Woods | 1 | \$551,098 | \$48,000,000 | \$48,551,098 |
| 4. Rory McIlroy | 3 | \$9,468,190 | \$37,500,000 | \$46,968,190 |
| 5. Arnold Palmer | 4 | — | \$40,000,000 | \$40,000,000 |
| 6. Jack Nicklaus | 5 | \$41,500 | \$22,000,000 | \$22,041,500 |
| 7. Jason Day | 28 | \$11,938,330 | \$7,500,000 | \$19,438,330 |
| 8. Rickie Fowler | 12 | \$8,254,416 | \$9,000,000 | \$17,254,416 |
| 9. Justin Rose | 7 | \$7,119,762 | \$8,000,000 | \$15,119,762 |
| 10. Gary Player | 11 | — | \$15,000,000 | \$15,000,000 |
| 11. Bubba Watson | 10 | \$8,289,297 | \$6,000,000 | \$14,289,297 |
| 12. Henrik Stenson | 18 | \$8,513,827 | \$5,000,000 | \$13,513,827 |
| 13. Dustin Johnson | 22 | \$6,209,467 | \$6,000,000 | \$12,209,467 |
| 14. Greg Norman | 17 | — | \$12,000,000 | \$12,000,000 |
| 15. Zach Johnson | 29 | \$5,728,154 | \$5,500,000 | \$11,228,154 |
| 16. Sergio Garcia | 8 | \$2,917,143 | \$7,500,000 | \$10,417,143 |
| 17. Jim Furyk | 13 | \$4,112,664 | \$5,750,000 | \$9,862,664 |
| 18. Adam Scott | 9 | \$1,494,529 | \$8,000,000 | \$9,494,529 |
| 19. Bernhard Langer | 20 | \$3,562,370 | \$5,750,000 | \$9,312,370 |
| 20. Matt Kuchar | 14 | \$3,810,304 | \$5,500,000 | \$9,310,304 |
| 21. Colin Montgomerie | 24 | \$2,666,177 | \$6,500,000 | \$9,166,177 |
| 22. Hideki Matsuyama | 36 | \$4,121,146 | \$5,000,000 | \$9,121,146 |
| 23. Ernie Els | 15 | \$521,154 | \$8,000,000 | \$8,521,154 |
| 24. Tom Watson | 33 | \$408,751 | \$7,500,000 | \$7,908,751 |
| 25. Nick Faldo | 35 | \$47,275 | \$7,500,000 | \$7,547,275 |
| 26. Jimmy Walker | 21 | \$5,035,850 | \$2,500,000 | \$7,535,850 |
| 27. Davis Love III | 39 | \$1,505,771 | \$6,000,000 | \$7,505,771 |
| 28. Brandt Snedeker | 46 | \$3,985,556 | \$3,500,000 | \$7,485,556 |
| 29. Fred Couples | 34 | \$729,991 | \$6,500,000 | \$7,229,991 |
| 30. Lee Westwood | 27 | \$1,421,011 | \$5,750,000 | \$7,171,011 |
| 31. Martin Kaymer | 19 | \$2,430,945 | \$4,000,000 | \$6,430,945 |
| 32. Louis Oosthuizen | NR | \$4,110,531 | \$2,250,000 | \$6,360,531 |
| 33. Miguel A. Jimenez | 37 | \$1,830,883 | \$4,500,000 | \$6,330,883 |
| 34. Ryo Ishikawa | 32 | \$1,134,487 | \$5,000,000 | \$6,134,487 |
| 35. J.B. Holmes | NR | \$4,369,930 | \$1,750,000 | \$6,119,930 |
| 36. Patrick Reed | 43 | \$4,321,960 | \$1,750,000 | \$6,071,960 |
| 37. Charley Hoffman | NR | \$4,546,129 | \$1,500,000 | \$6,046,129 |
| 38. Luke Donald | 30 | \$1,994,152 | \$4,000,000 | \$5,994,152 |
| 39. Graeme McDowell | 25 | \$1,188,463 | \$4,750,000 | \$5,938,463 |
| 40. Keegan Bradley | 31 | \$2,167,579 | \$3,750,000 | \$5,917,579 |
| 41. Hunter Mahan | 26 | \$1,908,973 | \$4,000,000 | \$5,908,973 |
| 42. Stacy Lewis | 41 | \$1,893,423 | \$4,000,000 | \$5,893,423 |
| 43. Paul Casey | NR | \$3,768,311 | \$2,000,000 | \$5,768,311 |
| 44. Ian Poulter | 38 | \$2,154,348 | \$3,500,000 | \$5,654,348 |
| 45. Bill Haas | NR | \$3,309,024 | \$2,250,000 | \$5,559,024 |
| 46. Danny Lee | NR | \$4,515,933 | \$850,000 | \$5,365,933 |
| 47. Lydia Ko | NR | \$3,800,802 | \$1,500,000 | \$5,300,802 |
| 48. Sangmoon Bae | NR | \$2,794,632 | \$2,500,000 | \$5,294,632 |
| 49. Pdraig Harrington | 48 | \$1,491,667 | \$3,750,000 | \$5,241,667 |
| 50. Paula Creamer | 47 | \$363,485 | \$4,750,000 | \$5,113,485 |

NR Not ranked among the Golf Digest 50 in March 2015.

SOURCES Figures for the list were compiled through Golf Digest interviews with agents, players, executives of companies involved with endorsements, industry analysts and through the official money lists of the professional tours.

poorly. For decades, golf positioned itself as a sport whose value was defined not by the size of its audience but by the quality of those fans—a demographic with buying power. In the heady early days of Tiger-generated TV ratings, golf got taken out of its game plan.

“Tiger got golf off message, but we all got swept up in it,” says one business insider, speaking not for attribution because he does business with the PGA Tour. “They got very fortunate that Jordan came along with his squeaky-clean image. Rickie gets it in terms of the media, the public and sponsors. Jason got his act together. But I still think Rory will be the guy.”

Despite not winning a major in 2015, McIlroy won twice on the PGA Tour, including the WGC-Cadillac Match Play, and three times on the European Tour, including the DP World Tour Championship.

Spieth had five PGA Tour wins, including the Masters and the U.S. Open; Day had the PGA Championship, The Barclays and the BMW Championship among his five tour wins; Fowler earned titles at the Players and the Deutsche Bank; and Zach Johnson, who is No. 15 on the GD50, won the British Open for his second major and 12th career victory.

“In terms of entertainment and growing the game, we have some really good kids: Rickie, Rory, Jordan and Jason,” says the business insider. “The consumer wants good guys. That’s who these kids are.”

Agents even speak glowingly of clients who are not their own, realizing their greatness will lift the entire golf market the way Woods helped make money for everyone associated with the game. Spieth is represented by Lagardère Unlimited, Johnson is at Wasserman with Day and Fowler, and McIlroy is the sole client at Rory McIlroy Inc.

Before Tiger, the leading money-winner on the PGA Tour made barely more than the average Major League Baseball player. Woods changed all that. He helped quintuple PGA Tour purses and brought in new sponsors like financial institutions, elec-

tronics, pharmaceuticals and petrochemicals.

“The amount of money that companies looked to spend in the sport increased, the number of nonendemic industries grew with Tiger playing professionally, the endemics took a whole different view of the sport, Nike actually got into the golf business, the game became more global,” says Mark Steinberg of Excel Sports Management, which represents Berger and Thomas in addition to Woods and GD50-ranked Justin Rose and Matt Kuchar.

In 1995, the year before Woods turned pro, Greg Norman led the PGA Tour money list with \$1.6 million. This year, Spieth earned more than \$23 million on the golf course, including official and unofficial money and his \$10 million FedEx Cup bonus, an addition to the tour during the Woods era.

Spieth also earned \$30 million off the course. And there is no arena of sports marketing not open to golfers.

“Look at Patrick Rodgers,” Mascarello says. “He has a relationship with the Indianapolis Colts. He’s from Indiana, is a Colts guy; it was a natural progression. Rickie Fowler is with Farmers Insurance and Quicken Loans, but also Red Bull, which hadn’t been in the golf game. It used to be branding and client entertainment. Now with social media you can have a corporate relationship without wearing a logo or showing up at a golf outing. Like Rickie and Mercedes are doing some digital things together, but with no logo on him.”

The new generation is connecting with sponsors and consumers in the same way it connects with fans and

TIGER'S EARNINGS: \$1.4 BILLION AND COUNTING

| YEAR | ON COURSE | OFF COURSE | TOTAL |
|--------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1996 | \$894,060 | \$12,250,000 | \$13,144,060 |
| 1997 | \$2,380,831 | \$19,500,000 | \$21,880,831 |
| 1998 | \$2,927,946 | \$27,000,000 | \$29,927,946 |
| 1999 | \$7,681,625 | \$27,000,000 | \$34,681,625 |
| 2000 | \$11,034,530 | \$38,000,000 | \$49,034,530 |
| 2001 | \$7,771,562 | \$56,000,000 | \$63,771,562 |
| 2002 | \$8,292,188 | \$67,000,000 | \$75,292,188 |
| 2003 | \$6,700,288 | \$77,000,000 | \$83,700,288 |
| 2004 | \$6,370,407 | \$83,000,000 | \$89,370,407 |
| 2005 | \$11,992,739 | \$75,000,000 | \$86,992,739 |
| 2006 | \$11,941,827 | \$87,000,000 | \$98,941,827 |
| 2007 | \$22,902,706 | \$99,800,000 | \$122,702,706 |
| 2008 | \$7,737,626 | \$109,600,000 | \$117,337,626 |
| 2009 | \$21,015,196 | \$100,900,000 | \$121,915,196 |
| 2010 | \$2,294,116 | \$72,000,000 | \$74,294,116 |
| 2011 | \$2,067,059 | \$62,000,000 | \$64,067,059 |
| 2012 | \$9,124,386 | \$77,000,000 | \$86,124,386 |
| 2013 | \$12,091,508 | \$71,000,000 | \$83,091,508 |
| 2014 | \$610,775 | \$54,500,000 | \$55,110,775 |
| 2015 | \$551,098 | \$48,000,000 | \$48,551,098 |
| TOTAL | \$156,382,473 | \$1,263,550,000 | \$1,419,932,473 |

friends—on smartphones. “It’s their way of life,” Steinberg says. “Companies now ask, ‘What is your following; will you be willing to tweet X amount of times for our brand?’ etc. Those were not the questions being asked in the ’90s. Times have changed, and the next generation evolved with that change.”

SPIETH'S BIG DEAL

Sitting at the top of that marketing and performance pyramid is Spieth, who signed a 10-year contract extension with Under Armour even before he won two majors in 2015. “Both parties went into this knowing he would win major championships, and we built that into this unprecedented relationship,” says Jay Danzi, who represents Spieth for Lagardère. “Jordan’s bought into a brand

strategy from the beginning, and people are getting to see what an amazing person he is.”

Adds David M. Carter, founder of The Sports Business Group: “[Spieth’s] approachability and likability will go a long way with a wide range of consumers and fans who have been consistently disappointed by other superstars.”

In November, when Spieth traveled to the Australian Open, Under Armour was all over it, setting up a junior clinic there under the slogan “Rule Yourself” and promoting it on Instagram, Twitter and its website.

It’s a new world of marketing in pro golf and a new galaxy of stars, with compelling rivalries that might extend beyond the Big Four. And that new reality seems to have golf in a very good place. **G**



'THE NO. 1 PLAYER [RORY MCILROY] COULDN'T PLAY FOR SIX WEEKS, AND THERE WAS MORE ATTENTION TO THE GAME THAN EVER. IT'S LIKE HAVING DEPTH ON YOUR ROSTER IN WINNING A SUPER BOWL.' —AGENT JOHN MASCARELLO



We begin with
a disclosure:

When you ask folks in all walks
of golf life a personal question,
it's only fair to answer it yourself.
The question was this:

"How much cash do you
have on you . . . and why?"

Cash is still king, right?
Even in this age of credit cards
and electronic banking,
people still carry cash. OK,
well, most people.

**ON TOUR,
IT'S**

**ANYWHERE
FROM
\$0 TO A LOT
MORE**

BY DAVE SHEDLOSKI

HOW MUCH CASH DO YOU CARRY?

I had \$182 when I stopped
Golf Channel's Brandel Chamblee
at the Open Championship
last summer at St. Andrews.
To Chamblee's credit, he was
forthcoming. (One major
champion declined—old school.)
Chamblee, a former PGA Tour
player, was carrying \$80, plus £70.
"I usually carry about \$300,"
he said. "I'm not extravagant.
I mean, if this is a contest, then
Phil Mickelson is going to win it."

Well, it isn't a contest, just a
survey. And we'll get to Phil in a
bit. But what did we learn?

One surprise was that a few

golf writers actually carry more
than some players. Aren't writers
supposed to be broke? Another
surprise, and a nice one, was that
most people with cash on hand
were thinking of others, mainly
in the tipping department.
That says a lot about people in
the golf business.

What was no surprise is that
the vast majority of players carry



a little more cash than the average person. Beyond tipping the locker-room attendants and assorted other service providers, there are real uses for cash. One is that players want to make sure they're not stiffing anyone if one of those Tuesday practice-round bets—supposedly banned by the tour—goes bad.

It seems like every week we're reading a story about cash being dead, dying or degraded. As we were preparing this story, Tim Cook, chief executive of Apple, was predicting the demise of money . . . while promoting the Apple Pay alternative.

Hmmmm. Seems correlative.

A big job doesn't always equate to a big roll of cash, though we've seen President Obama springing for burgers. A number of First Golfers appear on currency, but these three didn't carry much—or any—of it:

- In 2014, presidential historian Thomas Whalen told the BBC that John F. Kennedy "didn't carry any cash at all, even before he was president. His friends would have to foot the bill for the privilege of hanging out with him."

- Dwight Eisenhower once had to borrow money to buy a toy for a grandchild.

- In 1989, *People* magazine asked George H.W. Bush how much he was carrying. The answer: \$53. "I've had it there for quite a while," he said.

As for the average person, a *Money* magazine survey in 2013 revealed the following:

- 42 percent of the people surveyed carry \$1-\$40 in cash.
- 30 percent carry \$41-\$99.
- 17 percent carry \$100-\$199.
- 11 percent carry \$200 or more.

We writers are always looking for what we like to call "the money quote." Bonanza: The rest of this story is nothing but money quotes.

MARK O'MEARA: "I'm going to guess \$750. [*Gets out bills, counts . . . \$752.*] That's a pretty good guess, huh? I feel uncomfortable if it gets less than \$300, because I like to pay cash for things. Other guys, I know, are more heavy on credit cards, but you can't tip people with credit cards. And you always think there might be something you need in a pinch that requires cash."

LIZETTE SALAS: "I've got 10 bucks in my pocket. Won a bet with my pro-am partner. I said, 'Hey, closest to the pin, 10 bucks,' and I won. Good thing—I didn't have 10 bucks on me."

JESSICA KORDA: "None, because my wallet is back in my room, but there's about 40 bucks in it. We aren't like PGA Tour players—they carry half their bank account with them."

DAMON GREEN, caddie for Zach Johnson: \$800. "That's probably about normal."

ZACH JOHNSON: usually \$100-\$300. "He [Green] has more than me."

GREEN: "Well, if I get into a game and I don't play well, I want to take care of it right away."

JOHNSON: "Well, so do I. I lost \$20 on Tuesday to Brendon Todd. I paid off right away." (Ernie Els, who was carrying £700 when we talked to him, is another proponent of fast pay: "I like to pay off on any golf bets right there on the spot. Because I would expect the same.")

JACK NICKLAUS: usually \$300-\$700, plus a commemorative £5 note with his likeness commissioned by the Royal Bank of Scotland in 2005. Jack's general rule: a credit card for purchases over \$150 and cash for items less than that.

ELLIE DAY, the week her husband, Jason, won the PGA Championship at Whistling Straits: \$20. "I don't usually need to carry cash on the road. I'm bad about it."

ADAM SCOTT: "No more than a few hundred bucks, maybe \$300-\$400. I never used to carry even that much, but spending a lot of time in the U.S., I've become used to the tipping culture. I like it, actually. It's one of the best things about America. It works well, I think. I like the feeling of looking after someone, safe in the knowledge that someone else would look after

me in similar circumstances.”

MIKE WHAN, PGA Tour commissioner: “About \$300, because it’s pro-am day. I asked myself, *How do I interact with 40 groups in the pro-am without being a creepy 50-year-old guy?* So I walk out and make bets with the players, like ‘I bet you can’t hit it within 10 feet’ stuff. So I need cash to pay them off.”

CHARLIE MEACHEM, former PGA commissioner: “I usually don’t have more than \$200, usually in twenties. Plus, I have a habit of buying those instant lottery games, and I buy those in denominations of \$20. Last month I was near San Francisco and I had a winner, and although I’ve won before, it usually is \$50 here or there. This time I won \$1,000. The directions said I could mail it in or go collect in person. I thought, *There’s no way I’m sticking this in the mail.* Now I’m hooked. But it’s some innocent fun. As for carrying more than \$200, I don’t see a reason for it. If I need more, I can go to an ATM and get more.”

DAN JENKINS, Golf Digest Writer-at-Large: “In the gambling days of my youth around Goat Hills or other places of interest, I always carried at least \$25 to pay off losses. That was probably the equivalent of \$50 or \$100 today. But I never intended to lose, and most often didn’t. But I wanted to be able to pay, unlike one or two others in the group who chose to owe.”

HANK HANEY: \$556. “I probably don’t need anything more than \$20 and a credit card.”

TY VOTAW, PGA Tour chief marketing officer: \$100. “I usually carry very little. It’s all credit cards. I pay for everything with MasterCard [a tour sponsor], of course.” [Grins.]

SEAN FOLEY, swing instructor: “I don’t carry anything in my pockets because it bulges out and makes me look even shorter than I already am. I do usually have a couple hundred in my bag, though, which is a habit left over from when I worked as a waiter.”

MORGAN PRESSEL: “About \$150. Usually I just swipe the credit card. What are you trying to do, get me robbed?” [Laughs.]

STUART APPLEBY, after a round: “I’ve got 50 cents in my pocket. That’s a 1966 50-cent coin [that he uses to mark his ball]. A cou-

ple of hundred bucks is about all I like to carry. Probably goes back to my upbringing, but still seems like a lot to me.”

STEVE BURKOWSKI, Golf Channel announcer: \$2,000. “That’s a bit higher than normal. It’s usually about \$500, but I know there’s a casino about 20 miles from here, and I figured I might want to check it out.”

AUSTIN ERNST, PGA Tour: “About 14 bucks. I lost a bet last week. Got cleaned out playing blackjack.”

MARK STEVENS, PGA Tour media official: \$0. “I stopped carrying cash a few years ago.”

PAULA CREAMER: “Usually about \$200. I don’t carry crazy amounts, and it’s always small bills. I want to be ready for the everyday things that come up. I get hungry a lot and pull into places for snacks. I pay cash for gas, too.”

RON SIRAK, Golf Digest Senior Writer: “On every trip I leave with \$400 in twenties. I break one twenty at the airport buying coffee and break another twenty buying The New York Times, to give me hotel tip money for the week. I learned to carry cash when I played the Callaway Invitational in 1997. After my practice round, I got hit with a \$125 caddie fee and had to scramble to an ATM.”

DOUG FERGUSON, Associated Press golf writer: “I think I have \$7. [Checks, sees a five and two ones.] Usually I have between \$40 and \$60. But I gave a \$10 tip at a media-day outing the other day. And my Starbucks card just ran out, and I had to pay for coffee. A couple of things out of the ordinary, so I’m low. But if I’m going to be playing golf, I’ll get \$150-\$200 to not be short with a caddie, because that’s bad. It’s funny, whenever I have



a lot of cash—maybe at the start of a trip—I never spend anything, but whenever all I have is a twenty is when I get stuck needing to tip or I end up in a cash-only restaurant.”

DAVIS LOVE III: “I never carry around more than \$500. Seems like I’m always trying to scrape together 30 bucks for something. In the locker room, I’m usually looking for a hundred bucks from another player to take care of somebody. And I’m always out of money at the end of the week.”

MIKE MORAGHAN, executive director of the Connecticut State Golf Association: “I have a twenty, two fives and two ones on my person at the moment for a grand total of 32 bucks. It’s what I had left over when I got home last night after a week in California attending the International Association of Golf Administrators Annual Meeting. I went out there with about \$250 in cash knowing I might buy a few rounds of drinks and tip generously to anyone carrying a bag or a tray—as I did many, many years ago.”

KEN MACDONALD, who has been volunteering at Firestone since the 1966 PGA Championship: \$142. “But that’s only because a buddy owed me \$100, and I just got it in the mail.”

COURTNEY HOLT, Golf Channel senior director of player relations and booking: “I probably have about \$50 in my purse. I usually don’t like to have less than that. A lot of younger people today, they don’t carry any cash. I have a lot of friends like that, and I don’t know how anybody gets by that way, especially when you need to tip people. That’s what you should do a story on: the lost art or courtesy of tipping people.”

SLUGGER WHITE, PGA Tour rules official: \$300. “I’m usually

not comfortable with less than \$400. It goes back to something that happened to me about 30 years ago when I took a group of people out to dinner. I tried to pay for it with American Express, but they didn’t take that card, and it was the only one I had. I didn’t have enough cash to cover it, and I had to ask some of my party to help me out. I don’t think I ever was more embarrassed. I felt awful.

I paid everyone back, but it was a lesson for me. I see young guys today who don’t carry a lot of cash, and I wonder how they take care of things, if they’re tipping people—I hope they are. They could learn a thing or two from Phil. I watched him tip \$20 at The Barclays when all he had for breakfast was two strips of bacon. But there he goes before going out to play, putting \$20 on the table. He’s the best tipper on tour. You should ask him.”

Indeed, last year at the Memorial Tournament, Mickelson handed the attendant at the halfway house at Muirfield Village a \$100 tip. All Phil had was a hot dog—without the bun. We finally caught up with him at the WGC-Bridgestone Invitational. He was forthcoming, which is so Phil. He keeps some cash in his pocket, some in his golf bag. “I probably have five grand, more or less,” he said. “I want to take care of people. You shouldn’t be expecting stuff for free. If someone does something for you, you should take care of them.”

Later came a text, Phil following up: *\$6,500 in \$100s and \$1,600 in \$20s. \$8,100 total.* So, that’s how you become the best tipper on the PGA Tour. **G**

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY Max Adler, Bob Carney, Jaime Diaz, John Huggan, Mike O’Malley, Matthew Rudy, Ron Sirak and Guy Yocom.

‘I DIDN’T HAVE ENOUGH CASH TO COVER [DINNER], AND I HAD TO ASK SOME OF MY PARTY TO HELP ME OUT. I DON’T THINK I EVER WAS MORE EMBARRASSED.’

—SLUGGER WHITE, PGA TOUR RULES OFFICIAL

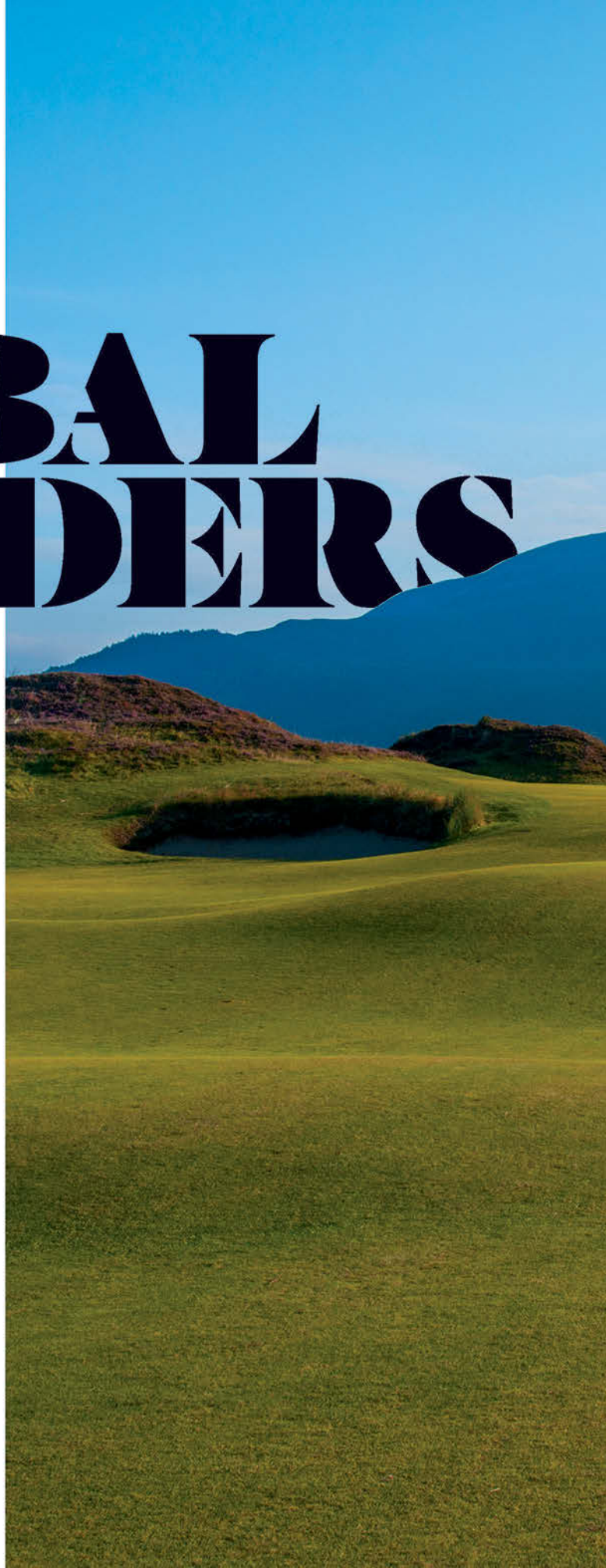


GLOBAL WONDERS

ROYAL COUNTY DOWN TOPS OUR WORLD 100

BY RON WHITTEN

Much as life on earth, golf first emerged from the sea, taking root on sandy deltas and shorelines, what golfers now call linksland, where it remained for generations before moving inland. As the game moved closer to population centers, those who staked out golf holes sought sandy soil whenever possible, for good reason: Sand would sprout springy turf, which bounced the golf ball and quickly drained after heavy rain. ► Invariably, where there was sand, there was wind, pushing and shaping landscapes onto which golf holes logically fit, carving out dips and hollows that served as bunkers. Wind was also an essential element. Without it, golf was simply pub darts.





TIME TO BUCKLE UP:
THE 228-YARD FOURTH HOLE
AT ROYAL COUNTY DOWN.

Grand early courses clung to the coastlines. Those that couldn't tried to emulate the look, feel and experience. That changed in the middle of the past century, when courses became a major sales tool of housing developers on ill-suited sites. The game became aerial and heroic, over chasms and lakes, down rocky hillsides and canyons. Architects used bulldozers as their pencils, some producing layouts with no more artistry than road builders.

That dark period is behind us, halted by the collapse of the housing economy and by a new generation of golf architects who are endeavoring to bring golf back down to earth. They seek seaside settings for their work, and though precious few are still available in the United States, elsewhere on Planet Earth, ocean waves lap against some of the most gorgeous layouts ever seen.

That's clearly evident in Golf Digest's second bien-

nial ranking of the World 100 Greatest Golf Courses. Forty-six of the Top 100 are courses on seaside venues. That includes Northern Ireland's Royal County Down, a surprising though deserving new No. 1, replacing New Jersey's Pine Valley, which has plenty of sand but no ocean and is now No. 3 on our exclusive list. Royal County Down, on rugged, windblown topography along the Irish Sea and beneath the Mountains of Mourne, features snarling bunkers edged by marram grass and dates from 1889.

At the other end of the same spectrum is Cabot Cliffs, which Golf Digest named the Best New Course of 2015 just two months ago. It debuts at No. 19 on our World ranking, 74 spots ahead of its companion layout, the three-year-old Cabot Links. Both are strung along bluffs above the Gulf of St. Lawrence in northwest Nova Scotia, with the Bill Coore/Ben Crenshaw-designed

Cabot Cliffs at a higher elevation and providing the most thrills and photo ops via eight holes that hug the coastline.

Another Coore/Crenshaw creation, Shanqin Bay Golf Club, in seaside sand dunes on China's Hainan Island, joins the World list at No. 37. Said by some to be the best course in Asia, Shanqin Bay is so dramatic and entertaining that it has apparently bedazzled China's ruling Communist Party, which a year ago closed 66 courses across the nation—including many new ones—but spared Shanqin Bay.

Toss in Coore and Crenshaw's other World 100 designs—No. 40 Barnbougle Lost Farm along the ocean in Tasmania, Australia, and No. 53 Friar's Head above Long Island Sound in New York—and it's understandable why they're considered the hottest design firm in the business today.

Please turn to page 83

ROYAL COUNTY DOWN
OPENED IN 1889
AND FEATURES THE
CHAMPIONSHIP LINKS AND
THE ANNESLEY LINKS.



FORBIDDEN TURF

Getting through customs and onto Cuba's only 18-hole course

BY ASHLEY MAYO



It's not impossible to get to Cuba, even if you're an American. All you need to do is cite one of the 12 accepted reasons (essentially anything other than straight toes-in-the-sand tourism) to get a visa. Officially, I was there to visit family but also planned on playing Varadero Golf Club, the only 18-hole course on the island.

I was born and raised in the United States, but I traveled with two Cubans—my mom, Anna Marie, and her cousin, Abraham. We booked our flights through cubatravelservices.com, which is one of the more popular organizations arranging charter flights between the United States and Cuba. The rest is cake: It takes just 41 minutes to fly from Miami to Havana.

I didn't bring my clubs, which was smart. Baggage claim at José Martí International Airport took twice as long as the flight, because it can be a real process to unload each pas-

senger's 80ish-pound cellophane-wrapped behemoth of clothes, food and electronics. American goods do much to augment the quality of life for Cubans whose average salary is \$20 a month. The shoes and Oreo cookies I gave my cousins were huge hits.

This was my mom's fourth visit since fleeing the country as a 12-year-old. She was one of 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban minors who sought freedom in the United States from 1960-'62 in Operation Peter Pan, which was organized by the Catholic Church. My mom first went to an orphan-

age in Paterson, N.J., and would live in four foster homes before setting out on her own.

One of her cousins, Jose, drives a taxi and fetched us at the airport in his '54 Chevy. In a one-story concrete house, Jose lives with his wife, their two kids, his mom and dad, his sister and her two kids, with lots of noisy pigs and chickens outside. So my mom and I could have his bed, Jose's dad slept on the floor.

The building where my mom grew up is abandoned. Walking around her neighborhood, she pointed out where she used to roller

skate and which crumbling structures used to be stores. Kids begged us for money.

To satisfy my golf itch, eight of us piled into two cars and drove the two hours east to Varadero. Many Canadian and European vacationers are drawn to this 12-mile strip of beach. There are more than 50 resorts—mostly the all-inclusive variety. None of my family members who live in Cuba had ever visited them.

My cousins couldn't quite understand my passion for the game. Nor had they ever heard the name Tiger Woods.

Rolling up to Varadero Golf Club was easy. The staff members were multilingual, and I used my credit card for the \$120 green fee, which included a cart and a nice rental set.

Varadero churns out more than 30,000 rounds during peak season (October through April). Originally, it was a nine-hole course owned by the wealthy American du Pont fam-

THE 409-YARD 18TH AT VARADERO GOLF CLUB IS ONE OF TWO HOLES THAT RUN ALONG THE ATLANTIC OCEAN.

ily. The present 18-hole layout opened in 1998 and was designed by the Canadian architect Les Furber. The eighth and 18th holes run right along the ocean. In general, the course plays similar to one you'd find in Miami—flat, peppered with palm trees and water hazards.

Pedro Klein, the course's operations manager, says the Cuban government has plans to support the construction of 13 new courses to attract tourists. Though he guesses there are no more than 300 Cubans who play golf. Many are his employees.

Golf Digest Architecture Editor Ron Whitten has written that Cuba, with its topography and abundance of oceanfront, is golf's last frontier. (Its lost courses used to attract stars like Ben Hogan and Sam Snead.) But golf's revival as an authentic part of the culture is a ways off. As the eight of us drove back to Havana, we shared a strange sense of relief. The glitz in Varadero was nice, but the simplicity of Havana felt like home.

OPEN FOR
WORLD 100
RANKING



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Hello Tomorrow



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Continued from page 80

A NEW BEAUTY IN AUSTRALIA

Our ranking is based on an editorial review by 1,200 course-evaluation panelists across North America and more than 600 international panelists, with added insights by the editors of 30 international Golf Digest editions. Such global coverage is responsible for the discovery of Cape Wickham Links Golf Club on King Island, Australia, just three months old but worthy enough to make our ranking at No. 24. With 11 holes touching Bass Strait and ocean views from the other seven, this exciting new destination was designed by American architect Mike DeVries and golf writer Darius Oliver.

The trio of Mexican courses on the World 100 are right on an ocean. No. 52 Diamante (Dunes) on the Pacific side of Mexico's Baja Peninsula is a Davis Love III design that was recently improved by replacing two inland holes with two new ones on sand dunes along the beach. The nearby Ocean Course at Cabo del Sol, newly ranked at No. 70, is a unique Jack Nicklaus design that plays atop arid desert hills then descends to the Sea of Cortez on each nine. Tom Fazio's Queren-

cia, ranked No. 98, is just up the coast from Cabo del Sol, perched on hills above the sea. (For a three-part guide to Mexico's golf regions of Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Vallarta and the Riviera Maya, see pages 88-95.)

Nicklaus has four courses ranked among the World 100, which puts him second to Coore and Crenshaw for the most among active golf architects. Besides Cabo del Sol, two other Nicklaus designs are oceanside: No. 76 Punta Espada on the Caribbean in Cap Cana, Dominican Republic, and No. 94 Sebonack Golf Club overlooking Great Peconic Bay on Long Island. Nicklaus collaborated with Tom Doak on the latter. Doak also has No. 16 Cape Kidnappers in New Zealand—600 feet above the ocean but an ocean venue nonetheless—and No. 33 Barnbougle Dunes in Australia and No. 39 Pacific Dunes on the Oregon coast. Curiously, his links-like Ballyneal in the sand dunes of Eastern Colorado, ranked 68th in 2014, failed to make the list this time.

THE EIGHTH (ABOVE)
AT BILL COORE AND
BEN CRENSHAW'S NO. 37
SHANQIN BAY IN CHINA.

A LOOK AT RIO AND BEYOND

Also conspicuous by its absence is the seaside Castle Stuart Golf Links in Scotland, a Gil Hanse-Mark Parsinen collaboration that had been 87th on our 2014 list. Hanse's as-yet-unnamed 18 holes in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, won't open for public play until after it hosts the Summer Olympics golf competitions in August, so it won't be up for consideration until our next World 100 is announced, in 2018.

Other just-opened courses that could crack our list include Ocean Dunes on the same Australian island as Cape Wickham; Playa Grande in the Dominican Republic (totally remodeled by Rees Jones); South Cape Golf Course in South Korea, a Kyle Phillips design (whose Yas Links on Persian Gulf sand dunes is No. 46); the Tom Fazio-designed Christophe Harbour on St. Kitts; Comporta Dunes, a David McLay Kidd layout in Portugal; and Doak's Tara Iti in New Zealand.

Not coincidentally, all are adjacent to an ocean. That seems to be the new norm for a world ranking.

CAPE WICKHAM: THE HENNEBRYs • COURTESY OF SHANQIN BAY



THE 18TH HOLE
(FOREGROUND) AND
FIRST AT NO. 24
CAPE WICKHAM LINKS
IN AUSTRALIA.



GOLF DIGEST'S WORLD 100 GREATEST GOLF COURSES

- 1 Royal County Down G.C. (Championship)**
Newcastle, Northern Ireland
- 2 Augusta National (Ga.) G.C.**
U.S.A.
- 3 Pine Valley (N.J.) G.C., U.S.A.**
- 4 Cypress Point Club**
Pebble Beach, U.S.A.
- 5 Royal Dornoch G.C. (Championship), Scotland**
- 6 Royal Melbourne G.C. (West)**
Black Rock, Australia
- 7 Shinnecock Hills G.C.**
Southampton, N.Y., U.S.A.
- 8 St. Andrews Links (Old)**
Scotland
- 9 Muirfield, Gullane, Scotland**
- 10 Merion G.C. (East)**
Ardmore, Pa., U.S.A.
- 11 Oakmont (Pa.) C.C., U.S.A.**
- 12 Pebble Beach G. Links, U.S.A.**
- 13 National G. Links of America**
Southampton, N.Y., U.S.A.
- 14 Winged Foot G.C. (West)**
Mamaroneck, N.Y., U.S.A.
- 15 Fishers Island (N.Y.) Club**
U.S.A.
- 16 Cape Kidnappers**
Hawke's Bay, New Zealand
- 17 Sand Hills G.C.**
Mullen, Neb., U.S.A.
- 18 Kingston Heath G.C.**
Heatherton, Australia
- 19 Cabot Cliffs**
Inverness, Canada
- 20 Golf de Morfontaine**
Mortefontaine, France
- 21 Hirono G.C., Hyogo, Japan**
- 22 Trump Turnberry (Ailsa)**
Scotland
- 23 Sunningdale G.C. (Old)**
England
- 24 Cape Wickham Links**
King Island, Australia
- 25 Portmarnock G.C. (Championship), Dublin, Ireland**
- 26 Carnoustie G. Links (Championship), Scotland**
- 27 Royal Portrush G.C. (Dunluce), Northern Ireland**
- 28 Seminole G.C.**
Juno Beach, Fla., U.S.A.
- 29 Ellerston G. Cse.**
Hunter Valley, Australia
- 30 New South Wales G.C.**
La Perouse, Australia
- 31 Crystal Downs C.C.**
Frankfort, Mich., U.S.A.
- 32 Chicago G.C.**
Wheaton, Ill., U.S.A.

- 33 Barnbougle Dunes**
Bridport, Australia
- 34 Muirfield Village G.C.**
Dublin, Ohio, U.S.A.
- 35 Royal Birkdale G.C.**
Southport, England
- 36 Oak Hill C.C. (East)**
Rochester, N.Y., U.S.A.
- 37 Shanqin Bay G.C.**
Hainan Island, China
- 38 Oakland Hills C.C. (South)**
Bloomfield Hills, Mich., U.S.A.
- 39 Bandon (Ore.) Dunes G. Resort (Pacific Dunes), U.S.A.**
- 40 Barnbougle Lost Farm**
Bridport, Australia
- 41 St. George's G. and C.C.**
Etobicoke, Canada
- 42 The Country Club (Clyde/Squirrel)**
Chestnut Hill, Mass., U.S.A.
- 43 Fancourt (Links)**
George, South Africa
- 44 Kiawah Island (S.C.) G. Resort (Ocean), U.S.A.**
- 45 Royal St. George's G.C.**
Sandwich, England
- 46 Yas Links**
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
- 47 Royal Porthcawl G.C., Wales**
- 48 Wade Hampton G.C.**
Cashiers, N.C., U.S.A.
- 49 Kauri Cliffs**
Northland, New Zealand
- 50 North Berwick G.C., Scotland**
- 51 Whistling Straits (Straits)**
Haven, Wis., U.S.A.
- 52 Diamante G.C. (Dunes)**
Cabo San Lucas, Mexico
- 53 Friar's Head**
Baiting Hollow, N.Y., U.S.A.
- 54 Trump International G. Links, Aberdeen, Scotland**
- 55 Royal Melbourne G.C. (East)**
Black Rock, Australia
- 56 Casa de Campo (Teeth of the Dog)**
La Romana, Dominican Republic
- 57 Riviera C.C.**
Pacific Palisades, Calif., U.S.A.
- 58 Sentosa G.C. (Serapong)**
Singapore
- 59 Prairie Dunes C.C.**
Hutchinson, Kan., U.S.A.
- 60 Los Angeles C.C. (North)**
U.S.A.
- 61 Swinley Forest G.C.**
Ascot, England
- 62 The Alotian Club**
Roland, Ark. U.S.A.
- 63 Pinehurst (N.C.) Resort (No. 2), U.S.A.**
- 64 Kawana Hotel G. Cse. (Fuji)**
Shizuoka, Japan
- 65 Lahinch G.C. (Old), Ireland**
- 66 National G.C. of Canada**
Woodbridge, Canada
- 67 Southern Hills C.C.**
Tulsa, U.S.A.
- 68 Gozzer Ranch G. & Lake C.**
Harrison, Idaho, U.S.A.
- 69 Kingsbarns G. Links**
St. Andrews, Scotland
- 70 Cabo del Sol (Ocean)**
Los Cabos, Mexico
- 71 Valderrama G.C.**
Sotogrande, Spain
- 72 The Honors Course**
Ooltewah, Tenn., U.S.A.
- 73 Shadow Creek**
North Las Vegas, Nev., U.S.A.
- 74 The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip**
Ho Tram, Vietnam
- 75 Spring City G. & Lake Resort (Lake), Kunming, China**
- 76 Punta Espada G.C.**
Cap Cana, Dominican Republic
- 77 Olympic Club (Lake)**
San Francisco, U.S.A.
- 78 Club de Golf Memphrémagog**
Magog, Canada
- 79 The Club at Nine Bridges**
Jeju Island, South Korea
- 80 Peachtree G.C.**
Atlanta, U.S.A.
- 81 San Francisco G.C., U.S.A.**
- 82 Royal Lytham & St. Annes G.C., England**
- 83 The Els Club Teluk Datai**
Kedah, Malaysia
- 84 Nirwana Bali G.C.**
Tabanan, Indonesia
- 85 Tokyo G.C., Sayama City, Japan**
- 86 Sheshan International G.C.**
Shanghai, China
- 87 The National G.C. (Old)**
Cape Schanck, Australia
- 88 Leopard Creek C.C.**
Malelane, South Africa
- 89 The Golf Club**
New Albany, Ohio, U.S.A.
- 90 Bandon (Ore.) Dunes G. Resort (Bandon Dunes), U.S.A.**
- 91 Machrihanish G.C.**
Campbeltown, Scotland
- 92 Sunningdale G.C. (New)**
England
- 93 Cabot Links**
Inverness, Canada
- 94 Sebonack G.C.**
Southampton, N.Y., U.S.A.
- 95 Emirates G.C. (Majlis)**
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- 96 Naruo G.C., Hyogo, Japan**
- 97 Jumeirah G. Estates (Earth)**
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- 98 Querencia G.C.**
Los Cabos, Mexico
- 99 Gary Player C.C.**
Sun City, South Africa
- 100 G.C. Olgiata, Rome, Italy**

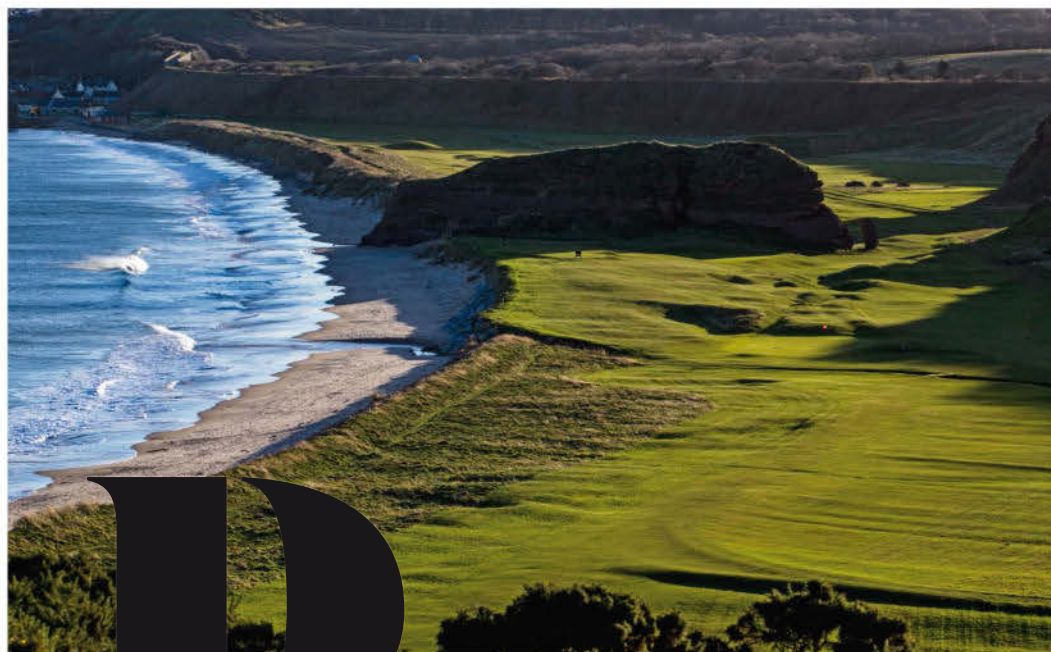


FOR PHOTOS & COURSE
descriptions of Golf Digest's
World 100 Greatest by
Architecture Editor Ron Whitten
and rankings of courses
in 206 countries, please see
golfdigest.com/go/planetgolf.

THE NON-100

The case for unrated short courses—the ones you play with new friends

BY DAVID OWEN



CULLEN GOLF CLUB
IN SCOTLAND IS JUST
OVER 4,600 YARDS
FROM THE TIPS, BUT
GOOD LUCK TRYING TO
BREAK THE PAR OF 63.

During 25 years of semi-obsession with golf, I've played roughly half the World 100 Greatest Golf Courses, mostly on assignment for this magazine. Like any conscientious golf tourist, I have quibbles with the list. (Why isn't Enniscrone on it?) But my main reaction, as I crossed off names with an orange highlighter, was that greatness alone is a fallible guide to pleasure. I also realized that some

of my favorite unlisted courses share what I assume to be an automatic disqualification: extreme shortness.

Length is overvalued in golf design. Many of the older courses on the World 100 have been stretched in recent years, sometimes by hundreds of yards, as greens committees and architects have struggled to foil the big hitters. But the counterintuitive truth is that adding length merely increases the advantage of length: The only real way to "Tiger-proof" a golf hole, paradoxically, is to make it

shorter. Shortness is a great equalizer, in part because short holes reward golf skills that power players tend to neglect.

Cullen Golf Club—not to be confused with Gullane Golf Club—is just over 4,600 yards long from the longest tees, yet it's a course I have sometimes dreamt about. It's in northeastern Scotland, roughly 50 miles across the Moray Firth from Royal Dornoch (No. 5) and about the same distance overland in the opposite direction from Trump International (No. 54). Old Tom Morris

laid out Cullen's original nine holes in 1870, and the pro at a nearby club squeezed in nine more in 1905. The routing crosses itself repeatedly, includes blind shots marked with painted arrows, and exploits geological oddities that, in their own way, are as stirring as the fjords of Cape Kidnappers (No. 16): turf-skirted rock formations the size of apartment buildings; a clifftop "marine platform" that you play up to, over, back across and down from.

Cullen doesn't receive many visitors from the United States.

The next American to sign the clubhouse guestbook after I first did, in 2007, was me again, a year later. But you should go if you have the chance. Par is 63. If the wind is blowing, you won't come close.

Formby Golf Club (another quibble) is six miles south of Royal Birkdale (No. 35), on the remarkable stretch of linksland that runs along the coast of northeastern England between Royal Liverpool (ahem) and Royal Lytham (No. 82). One of the many remarkable facts about Formby is that it encircles a second terrific course, Formby Ladies, which was founded in 1896 and is one of the world's vanishingly tiny number of true women's golf clubs. The course was designed by Willie Park and Harry S. Colt, and it's as challenging as the big course, though in a different way. "You told me it was 5,300 yards long," a man who

played in a tournament there once said; "you didn't tell me it was one yard wide." There's ball-swallowing heather on both courses, but the women have more of it, and they let it grow both taller and closer to the fairways. Two members and I got stuck behind three visiting men, who ignored us until the 11th, when we snuck past them while they searched for lost drives. We finished an hour before they did and watched from the front room of the women's clubhouse, known locally as the Monkey House, as they staggered in.

Rankings aside, the best golf courses, always, are the ones you play with friends, including friends you met that day on the first tee—and for me the best of those is my home course, which has just nine holes and, if you go around twice, is only slightly longer than Formby Ladies. Soon after I took up golf, in my mid-30s, I joined a second club, with a much longer course, because I couldn't believe that nine short holes could possibly contain my game. But I quit the big club six or seven years later, following a major clubhouse renovation, after realizing that the only thing in my new locker was its key, which I had never picked up. So now I'm stuck playing most of my rounds on the greatest golf course in the world.

ONLY THE BRAVE, THE RECKLESS OR
THE INTOXICATED WILL TRY TO DRIVE
THE 310-YARD FIFTH AT QUIVIRA GOLF
CLUB IN CABO SAN LUCAS, MEXICO.





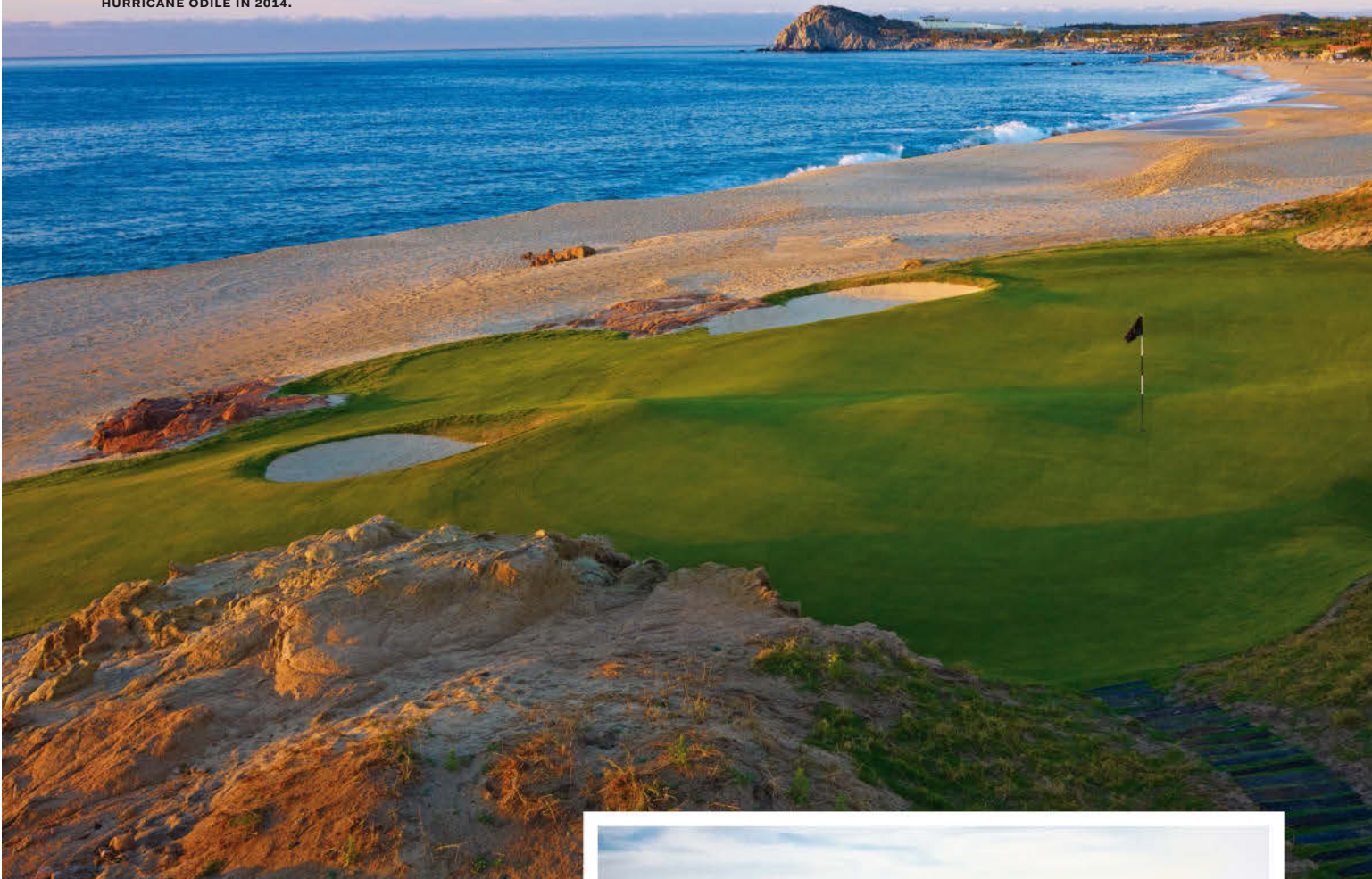
MY OH MY MEXICO

GOLF SOUTH OF THE BORDER HAS COME A LONG WAY

BY RON KASPRISKE

American golfers owe an apology to our amigos down south. For years, they have mainly looked east to the links courses of Ireland and Scotland when it came time to book a trip to an exotic and faraway land. If they wanted golf with a more tropical flair, it was the western Caribbean or Hawaii. If only they had known what they were missing. Three stalwart seaside destinations with numerous picturesque and playable courses—Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta and the Riviera Maya—can be found in Mexico. All you need are your clubs, a few pairs of shorts and shirts, and a pocketful of pesos (16.5 equals one U.S. dollar), and you're ready for an awesome vacation. Want a little more guidance? Here is our "need-to-know" guide to golf south of the border. Read on.

THE 139-YARD SEVENTH HOLE
AT CABO DEL SOL'S OCEAN
COURSE HAS BEEN RESTORED
AFTER IT WAS DAMAGED BY
HURRICANE ODILE IN 2014.



MEXICO'S TOP 15

- 1 **Diamante G.C. (Dunes)**, Cabo San Lucas, Baja California Sur
- 2 **Cabo del Sol (Ocean)**, Los Cabos, Baja California Sur
- 3 **Querencia G.C.**, Los Cabos, Baja California Sur
- 4 **Quivira G.C.**, Cabo San Lucas, Baja California Sur
- 5 **El Camaleón Mayakoba G. Cse.**, Riviera Maya, Quintana Roo
- 6 **Guadalajara C.C.**, Guadalajara, Jalisco
- 7 **El Dorado G. & Beach C.**, Los Cabos, Baja California Sur
- 8 **Four Seasons Punta Mita (Pacífico)**, Nayarit
- 9 **Chileno Bay C.**, Los Cabos, Baja California Sur
- 10 **Riviera Maya G.C.**, Akumal, Quintana Roo
- 11 **Diamante G.C. (El Cardonal)**, Cabo S.L., Baja Calif. Sur
- 12 **Mexico G.C.**, Mexico City
- 13 **Vista Vallarta (Weiskopf)**, Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco
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- 15 **Vista Vallarta (Nicklaus)**, Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco



PREVIOUS PAGE: COURTESY OF QUIVIRA

LOS CABOS: *If you're a golfer, ya gotta go*



A golf trip to Los Cabos is going to set you back. You'll probably still have room on your credit card for the duty-free shop on the way home, but even the best bargain hunters are going to struggle avoiding green fees north of \$150 at the area's nine public courses, and there clearly is a get-what-you-pay-for vibe to the hotel hierarchy around the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula.

And it's worth it.

Cabo is the type of golf destination that will make you wonder if it's the best you've ever visited. You'll play on surreal mountains-meet-desert-meets-tropics courses that look like green oases against the craggy terrain. You'll hit majestic tee shots over expansive cactus forests and along rugged seaside cliffs. You'll eat fish tacos and sip tequila at snack bars while waiting to tee off, and you might see whales breaching offshore before it's your turn to putt. And if you're still on a course—any course—at sunset, warm up your Instagram app. The sky turns to fire.

Are you in? *Muy bien*. Here's what you need to know: All the public courses can be found within a 28-mile stretch of coastline from Quivira Golf Club, a few miles west of downtown Cabo San Lucas, to Puerto Los Cabos golf course, a few miles east of San José del Cabo. The peak rate to play Quivira or Cabo del Sol's Ocean Course, the two best public courses in Mexico, are \$345 and \$365, respectively, this winter, and the lowest published rates in the area are \$190 at Club Campestre

San José and \$130 for 18 holes at the nine-hole Vidanta Los Cabos (\$75 for nine). But most offer price breaks in conjunction with hotel stays or if you play in the afternoon.

You'll likely fly into Los Cabos International Airport. It's modern and user-friendly for Americans—just ignore the pushy vendors—and driving in the region is fairly easy. A new toll road (approximately \$4 one way) makes getting from the airport to Cabo San Lucas a lot faster than the coastal route along Highway 1. And if you're worried about crime, don't be. It's wise to leave valuables secured at the hotel, but the region as a whole feels safe and people are mostly friendly.

Lodging options can be overwhelming. Everything from basic motels to uber-posh resorts are available. Expect to pay \$150 a night for a no-frills hotel, \$400-plus for an ocean-view room, and more than \$800 for the top lodging options from January through March. For example, the new and stylish JW Marriott Los Cabos Beach Resort & Spa has rooms starting at \$405 per night for a four-night stay in mid-January, and the opulent One & Only Palmilla resort will cost you \$1,000 (and way up) a night.

Just remember to look for lodging away from the unattractive and congested city centers of Cabo San Lucas and San José del Cabo, and stay near as many golf options as possible. The Marriott is within 15 minutes of three area courses, including one you could walk to—the hilly and super fun Puerto Los Cabos. It also gets kudos for having

one of the best breakfast buffets on the planet. (When you order tomato juice, they start squeezing.)

Of the area's many all-inclusive resorts (meals and alcohol are part of the package), the highly regarded Grand Fiesta Americana is within walking distance of the 36-hole Cabo del Sol golf club, and its rates in January start around \$475 a night. More all-inclusives worth checking out are Quivira's Pueblo Bonito resorts. Its Sunset Beach property is offering oceanside lodging and unlimited golf at Quivira for \$840 a night in the middle of January. Remember, you get what you pay for.

Though quality lodging is expensive, the food isn't. If you don't have a seafood allergy, you can thank us now. The ceviche and shellfish options in many places are *delicioso*, and the *huachinango a la Veracruzana* (red snapper in tomato sauce) is addictive. If you're in Cabo San Lucas, try Los Tres Gallos and its outdoor courtyard for dinner. In San José, grab breakfast at the Tropicana Inn (order the *machaca con huevos*). If you're in between, one of the best sea-bass sandwiches in Mexico is served for lunch at Cabo del Sol.

There are a few highly regarded private courses in the area, such as the No. 1-ranked course in Mexico, Diamante Dunes, and Diamante's new Tiger Woods-designed El Cardonal. You might talk your way onto one of them as a prospective real-estate shopper, or if you have some membership connection. But don't worry if you can't play them. The public courses offer the same types of golf experiences. —RK

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

BEST COURSE

(experienced players) Jack Nicklaus has his design stamp on many area courses, but Cabo del Sol's Ocean Course (above) is the best combination of shot values and sea views.

BEST COURSE

(higher handicappers) You can lose a lot of balls at Quivira, but you won't care because of the

spectacular setting. The quirky, fun design is like playing golf inside a Salvador Dali painting.

BEST SEASIDE HOLE

The fifth and sixth at Quivira are more than 100 feet above the beach, but the 12th is more exciting. The severe downhill is 635 yards from the tips and snakes its way to a beach where scenes from

the movie "Troy" were filmed. Don't make a wrong turn or you'll need a tow truck (bottom left).

BEST BARGAIN

The after-1:30 p.m. rate of \$185 at Puerto Los Cabos—which includes on-course food and beverages (alcohol, too)—is a decent value considering how much fun it is to play. Its up-and-down

design is like golf in an amusement park.

BEST 19TH HOLE

Trek up a winding, oceanfront cliff between the fourth and fifth holes at Quivira and stop at the patio snack bar (complimentary food and drinks). The setting above the aquamarine water of the Pacific is surreal.

BEST TURN

Between the ninth

and 10th at Cabo del Sol's Ocean Course is taco heaven (go with the shrimp). It's included in the fee.

BEST RANGE

The elevated tee at Club Campestre San José faces the Sea of Cortez. You'll have no problem staying there to work on your slice, but practice your putting before trying its crazy, undulating greens.

BEST INLAND HOLES

The 550-yard seventh hole on Palmilla's Mountain nine requires a big tee ball over a cactus forest and features distant views of the Sea of Cortez. Cabo Real's 454-yard, par-4 14th hole runs toward the mountains and along a cliff and might be the toughest birdie op in the region.

—RK

PUERTO VALLARTA: Ten courses and tequila—a lot of tequila—await

Across the Sea of Cortez from Cabo San Lucas, on the Mexico mainland's Pacific coast, it's Nicklaus country. But it's also tequila country, disparate entities united by their 19th-hole contributions, and each providing reasons to visit.

The Pacifico Golf Course at Punta Mita is one of four Jack Nicklaus designs in the Puerto Vallarta region and has 19 holes; the renowned Tail of the Whale is an optional par-3 third (*right*). It features an actual island green set in the ocean and requires a carry of at least 170 yards. The green is accessible only via an amphibious vehicle, surf permitting. Too choppy, you play the landlocked third.

As for tequila, by Mexican law the country's most famous adult beverage can be produced only in the state of Jalisco (*below, right*), of which Puerto Vallarta is a part. Every 19th hole in town has an ample selection with which to wind down. But back to the golf.

The Puerto Vallarta area, extending 29 miles northwest to Punta Mita, features 10 courses that range from oceanfront to jungle, and even to an urban area, the Marina Vallarta Golf Club, a block from the CasaMagna Marriott Puerto Vallarta Resort & Spa.

The two Nicklaus courses at Punta Mita are what we have come to expect of his Mexico designs—on the water with spectacular views. His course at Vista Vallarta, meanwhile, is cut through dense jungle in the hills above Puerto Val-

larta, as is the other course there, a Tom Weiskopf design that includes a great match-settling hole, the drivable par-4 18th.

All the courses in the region are accessible by cab, though it is advisable to agree on the fare before departing. It's a safe and inexpensive way to travel around town, though the round-trip fare to Punta Mita, about an hour ride, can get pricey.

As for feeling safe, the U.S. State Department does have a travel warning in place for the entire state of Jalisco because of organized-crime violence, and it cautions visitors to avoid rural areas. But that shouldn't be a problem. Seven of the 10 courses are in or around town, and the Punta Mita courses, as well as Litibu Golf Club nearby, are accessed via a populated highway. Cabs are a smart way to ensure you don't venture too far afield.

Golf is not as expensive as Los Cabos, but it's far from cheap. Green fees range from \$139 at the Marina Vallarta near downtown to \$240 at the Punta Mita courses.

The well-heeled, who are more likely to lean toward Punta Mita, might want to stay at one of the two hotels there—the Four Seasons or the St. Regis—where rooms can drift toward \$1,000 a night or more. Those into surfing also will appreciate the locale. El Faro, a popular surf break, is just off the 17th and 18th holes of the Bahia Course at Punta Mita.

If Punta Mita is too expensive, you'll have no problem finding

reasonably priced rooms in Puerto Vallarta, even on the water. Rooms less than \$200 a night are routinely available at the oceanfront CasaMagna Marriott and the Westin Resort & Spa minutes from the airport or downtown.

Those inclined to stay closer to the area's vibrant night scene might opt for one of many boutique hotels in "the Romantic Zone," with its restaurants, bars and shops. It's a short walk from Puerto Vallarta's renowned boardwalk, El Malecon.

For your first meal, consider Tacon de Marlin, a busy, informal restaurant directly across the street from the airport, which is why it's a favorite for locals as well as pilots and flight attendants. Its specialty: smoked-marlin tacos.

For a special occasion, it's tough to top Le Kliff. It's about a 25-minute cab ride south of town. It's a palapa-style, open-air restaurant that sits on the edge of a cliff overlooking the ocean.

Finally, don't forget the tequila. There are formal tasting events around town (for educational purposes, of course). One of them, the Vallarta, has three offerings: for beginners, connoisseurs and Mezcalero (for those interested in tequila's half brother, mezcal). There also are informal tastings, notably at one of Chile Tequila's sites where the cruise ships dock. (Ask for Angel Montiel Carvajal, the most gracious of hosts.)

If you're game, just remember to do as the locals do: sip, don't shoot.

—JOHN STREGG



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

BEST SEASIDE COURSE

The Pacifico Golf Course in Punta Mita is outstanding mainly because it has eight holes that are adjacent to or facing the ocean. But its inland holes, which feature views of the Sierra Madre Mountains, will resonate with fans of Jack Nicklaus' challenging designs.

BEST JUNGLE COURSE

The Weiskopf Course at Vista Vallarta looks like it was hacked from the jungle by machete—a whole lot of them. It's similar to the Nicklaus Course on the same property, but Weiskopf's design gets the nod because its manageable green complexes make it more fun to play.

BEST VALUE

Litibu Golf Club, a Greg Norman creation that transitions from a links course to a jungle layout, can be played for a comparatively low green fee of \$100.

BEST WILDLIFE

A crocodile sanctuary is just upriver from the Marina Vallarta Golf Club, and no one told the crocs they couldn't visit the golf

course. How bad do you want that golf ball you just dunked?

BEST HOLES

The Tail of the Whale at Pacifico is one of the most memorable holes in the world, but if you like something a little more traditional, not to be overlooked is the 571-yard 18th at Punta Mita's Bahia course. It plays down to a spot near the El

Faro surf break. Take some guilty pleasure in watching surfers eat it.

BEST THRILL

The new Greg Norman course at Vidanta Nuevo Vallarta is accessed via a one-lane golf-cart suspension bridge high over the Ameca River. Note: Only nine holes are open because of damage from

Hurricane Patricia in the fall.

BEST CHALLENGE

The 621-yard 18th at El Tigre Golf & Country Club leaves almost no margin for error down the left side, thanks to a massive water hazard.

BEST PERK

Flamingos Golf Club offers complimentary transportation back to main Puerto Vallarta hotels. —JS

JIM MANDEVILLE/NICKLAUS



AS LONG AS THE SEAS
AREN'T TOO ROUGH,
YOU CAN PUTT OUT
ON THE TAIL OF
THE WHALE PAR 3
AT PACIFICO GOLF
COURSE, COURTESY OF
AN AMPHIBIOUS CAR.



GETTY IMAGES

JACK NICKLAUS'
COURSES OFFER
SPECTACULAR VIEWS,
FROM THE OCEAN
TO THE JUNGLE.

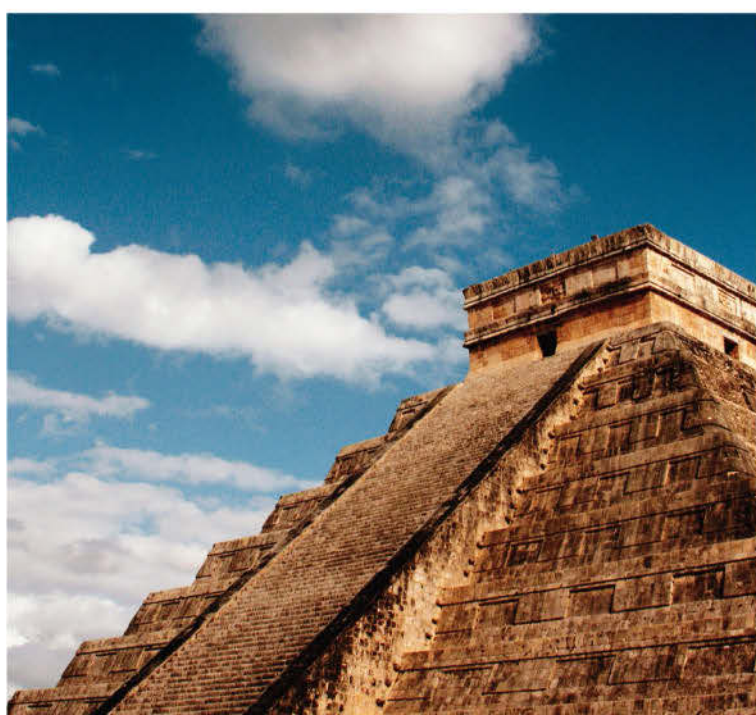
THINK A SHORT IRON
IS ALL YOU'LL NEED
FOR EL CAMALEÓN'S
155-YARD 15TH HOLE?
IF THE WIND IS COMING
OFF THE WATER,
THINK AGAIN.



HOW'S THE WEATHER?



If sunny and warm is what you seek, Mexico's three biggest golf destinations will not disappoint. In short, it's never too cold to play. Los Cabos is the warmest and driest, but its desert-ish climate can mean temperature extremes from 100 in the summer to highs in the 70s and lows in the 50s in January. It doesn't get as hot at the Riviera Maya or Puerto Vallarta, but the tradeoff is more humidity and rain in the summer months. Expect a rain shower or two on more than half the summer days. It rains in Los Cabos, too, but we're talking about four inches for an entire summer month and virtually nothing the rest of the year. —RK



GETTY IMAGES

RIVIERA MAYA: Golf options are plentiful—if you'll just leave your resort

My wife and I love it here,” says Frank, a retired auto-parts salesman from Texas as he prepares to tee it up at Playa Mujeres, a Greg Norman course at the Secrets resort just north of Cancun. “She likes to camp out at the pool and read her books, and I play golf. We never leave the premises.”

This is probably what a lot of tourists do in the Cancun area, and that's understandable. Many of the resorts here, like Secrets, are “all-inclusive,” which discourages off-campus forays because all meals and drinks are part of the room price. But that's a shame, because in addition to the many amusing and historical touristy things you can do in the region, it's also home to 15 golf courses. Why confine yourself to just one?

Cancun sits in the Southeast corner of Mexico on the Yucatán Peninsula, a little more than four hours by plane from New York or 2½ hours from Dallas. The area is known as the Riviera Maya, and it stretches about 75 miles from the high-rise bustle of Cancun down to the far quieter village of Tulum, famous for its Mayan ruins (*below, left*). Nearly all the golf courses are right along the main highway, Route 307, running between the two towns.

The most famous course is El Camaleón Mayakoba, a Greg Norman design that hosts the PGA Tour's OHL Classic in November. It's everything you would expect

from a top resort course—immaculate conditions, memorable 18 holes, solicitous service—and the price tag that comes with it. A round here is \$199 if you're a guest at one of Mayakoba's three hotels and \$299 if you're a visitor.

In truth, nearby Iberostar Playa Paraiso Golf Club might be as enjoyable as El Camaleón. What this fun P.B. Dye course lacks in gulf views it makes up for with huge undulations—in its fairways and its greens—and tons of visual variety. It's definitely worth buying a yardage book here because the course holds many mysteries for first-timers. The green fee is \$89 for resort guests and \$199 for visitors. Note: Don't mistake this one for the similarly named Iberostar Cancun Golf Club, which is a muntypetype course in the busy downtown “hotel zone.”

The area's southernmost course, at Tulum's Bahia Principe resort, is also excellent. Known as Riviera Maya Golf Club, it's a splashy Robert Trent Jones Jr. design with a lot of water, dramatic stone-lined fairways, and greens of smooth paspalum, a saltwater-tolerant grass. The fee is \$115 for resort guests, \$230 for visitors.

You'll probably pay less at the area's other courses, especially those without an official resort affiliation. The high-season rack rate at Nick Price-designed El Tinto, the first of two planned courses at the Cancun Golf Club near the airport, is \$180. But one thirtysomething group

that played it in the afternoon last fall paid \$55 each. They'd come over from a nearby hotel whose concierge had a line on discounted tee times. For an extra \$20, they got round-trip transportation.

Mayakoba is a popular spot for golfers to use as base camp. It has three hotels, The Fairmont, Rosewood and Banyan Tree, and sits almost halfway between Cancun and Tulum. Plus it's a quick drive from Playa del Carmen, a fun little beach town with shopping, restaurants and nightlife. Parking is easy and cheap there, and its walking-only Fifth Avenue is a lively strip that's great for after-dinner drinks and people-watching.

Apart from lounging on the beach or by the pool, the most popular local activities are touring the Mayan ruins and snorkeling the many coral reefs. The natural limestone sinkholes, known as cenotes (*say-NO-tays*), are big with the snorkeling and scuba crowd, and beginners are definitely welcome.

If you have a few hours to spare, take the 45-minute ferry from Playa del Carmen to the island of Cozumel. There's a modest golf course there, if you're so inclined. But this trip—roughly \$10.50 each way—is more about the journey. The views are world-class, and if you're lucky, when you return to Playa del Carmen the upper deck of your boat will feature a super-energetic band rocking out to '50s and '60s classics. No need to request “La Bamba”—they'll get to it. —PETER FINCH

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

BEST SCENERY

No. 15 at El Camaleón is 155 yards and runs alongside the Caribbean, offering stunning views of the beach and Cozumel. The 16th at Playa Mujeres, a short par 4 that plays into the wind, nearly touches the surf at its green.

BEST CHALLENGE

The aptly named Hard Rock Golf Club will wear you out.

It features narrow fairways, sharp doglegs and small greens. Oh, yeah, and there are six lakes. Note: Until recently this was known as Playacar Golf Club.

BEST COURSE (beginners)

Grand Coral Riviera Maya Golf Club has only one forced carry from the forward tees, so it's easy to keep it in play.

The rest of the tees aren't so forgiving. Designed by Nick Price, it's home to a stop on the Mexico Golf Tour.

BEST CENOTE

The sixth hole at Riviera Maya is a narrow par 4 guarded by a yawning 27-foot crater that's about twice the size of the green. It's a popular spot for mosquitos, so don't linger.

BEST EMERGENCY 18

Vidanta is a Jack Nicklaus-designed par-3 course. Formerly known as El Manglar, it'll take you three hours at most. Eight holes feature some form of water hazard, and No. 18 is an island green.

BEST ALL-INCLUSIVE GOLF

Stay at Moon Palace Cancun, home to three Jack Nicklaus

nines, and you get a resort credit of \$1,500 or more. You can spend it on golf, the spa, off-site tours, etc. Forego the credit, and you get unlimited golf for cart fees only (\$38 for your first round, \$19 for others).

BEST FOR GETAWAYS

El Tinto, Riviera Cancun Golf & Resorts and Puerto Cancun Golf Club are high-quality courses

within a short drive of the airport, making them ideal for a pre-flight round.

BEST WARNING



Stapled to the scorecard at Cozumel Country Club: “WARNING. There are CROCODILES found in ALL water features. . . . CROCODILES can launch themselves twice their body length out of the water.” —PF



The Ocean Course, Kiawah Island

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With 368 courses to choose from, South Carolina offers enough golf destinations to play new links every day of the year, and the variety matches the volume.

The state's layouts stretch from mountaintops to the waterfront, with hundreds of public courses featuring cascading waterfalls, gorgeous sand dunes, historical landmarks and 10 warm-weather months annually.

Kiawah Island Golf Resort is among the state's most famous properties and home to the legendary Ocean Course — host of the 2012 PGA Championship and named by Golf Digest as “America's Toughest Course.”



Discover the
people, the food
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that make
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Farther north, Myrtle Beach is one of North America's most iconic golf destinations. With more than 100 courses to play, the Grand Strand offers variety and challenging courses for every skill level. About 200 miles south is Hilton Head Island, home to beloved PGA Tour course Harbour Town Golf Links and dozens more pro-designed layouts.

In the Midlands, South Carolina's rich history is on display at The Patriot Course, where Davis Love III's design weaves in a replica of a Colonial—era fort just off Lake Greenwood.

In the Upstate, the Blue Ridge Mountains house some of the state's most beautiful golf courses. Cherokee Valley in the town of Travelers Rest is a must-play, showcasing vivid mountain backdrops and a signature 14th hole highlighted by a breathtaking waterfall.

With so many unique championship courses from the mountains to the sea, South Carolina is Just Right for golf getaways. ●



The Ocean Course is one of the nation's toughest links.



Natural water features dot courses across the state.



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ON TODAY'S TOUR, WHY NOT GIVE YOURSELF THE BEST CHANCE TO WIN BY
PLAYING AGGRESSIVELY, EVEN IF IT MEANS AN OCCASIONAL MISSED CUT?

BY JAIME DIAZ

ALL-OUT GOLF

►►► **AT 5-10, 145 POUNDS,**

Justin Thomas, 22, seems too slight and callow to be a good example—let alone a paragon—of the foundational act on which modern professional golf is built.

At least until he springs into his downswing with a driver. Thomas creates a 14.11-degree upward launch angle that is the highest on the PGA Tour, which combined with the seventh-lowest spin rate makes him the leading exemplar of the “high-launch, low-spin” mantra for ideal impact. The path of his soaring drives, which last year averaged 303.2 yards, traces the first, best step to succeeding on tour.

“I love hitting driver because the harder I swing, the straighter I seem to hit it,” says Thomas, the winner of last November’s CIMB Classic in Malaysia. “It

gives me a lot of wedges into greens. Which gives me a lot of looks inside 12 feet, which is a lot better than putting a 20-footer. When we get going with that approach, low rounds can get lower.”

Sensing that the implied flip side is that his high scores can get higher, Thomas adds, “I always want to be an aggressive player, but I don’t think I’m playing low percentage, if that makes sense.”

Considering what’s going on in professional golf, it absolutely does. It’s often said golf is primarily a game of minimizing mistakes. But on the professional tours, the priority on mistake avoidance has given way to a widespread style in which the percentage play—the smart play—is all-out golf.

One effect was evident at the start of the 2015-’16 wraparound season. Six of the first seven official events were won by young first-timers: Thomas, Emiliano Grillo, Smylie Kaufman, Peter Malnati, Russell Knox and Kevin Kisner, the oldest of the bunch at 31.

Other sports have seen similar “go for it” changes. In baseball, the Kansas City Royals based their World Series-winning offense on aggressive contact hitting intended to cut down on strikeouts. In the NBA, statistics prove that when teams can shoot a three-pointer instead of a two-pointer, they should. And in the NFL, supporting statistics have made going for it on fourth down more common.

Pro golf’s “Moneyball” breakthrough has come through the ShotLink-based strokes-gained concept. Although the average amateur can best cut strokes by playing more conservatively, statistics show the tour player

will have a better chance at success by playing more all out.

Consider any given Sunday on the PGA Tour. Players in the middle of the pack know that a low score could make a big difference in prize money, but a high one will mean relatively little. Ergo, go for it, with little to lose and much to gain.

Aggressive golf has always existed. Traditionally such play at big moments has gone down as romantic but foolish, like Billy Joe Patton rinsing risky second shots at the par-5 13th and 15th holes in the final round of the 1954 Masters. Arnold Palmer popularized the phrase “go for broke” with his exciting play-to-win style, which also caused some tragic losses. Lanny Wadkins and Johnny Miller got on some of the hottest pin-seeking streaks ever seen, but the judicious Jack Nicklaus, who always seemed to play well within the outer limits of his immense power, still set the standard of dominance in their era. Greg Norman’s “Shark Attack” strategy was a thrill ride, but he’s still best known for his flameouts.

Phil Mickelson’s 42 official

victories have raised the profile of aggressive golf. The downside of his style has been some surprisingly poor golf for such a great player. But when he was being criticized for some foolhardy risks in 2002, the then-majorless Lefty issued an impromptu manifesto in which he said, “If I change the way I play golf, one, I won’t enjoy it as much, and two, I won’t play to the level I’ve been playing. So I won’t ever change.”

Today, strapping Jamie Lovemark, 27, says he tries to approach the game “kind of like Phil. Either win, come close, or don’t play awesome.”

But the prime shaper of today’s bold style has been Tiger Woods. Though he possessed Nicklaus’ restraint in majors, Woods executed shots with a transcendent talent that was inspirational.

“More young guys watched Tiger and said, ‘Man, that looks like the way to play golf,’” Stuart Appleby says. Thomas and Jordan Spieth say it was Woods above everyone who shaped them as players. “It’s hard to describe how much,” Thomas says.

Woods’ influence is imbedded in Rory McIlroy and Jason Day. And Rickie Fowler reflected the best of Mickelson, his frequent practice-round partner, with uber-aggressive brilliance down the stretch in winning the Players Championship last May.

But the aggressiveness is as common at the mid-level and even lower reaches of the tour. Whether intuitively or by studying statistics, players have figured out that week to week, what matters more than ever is not who’s better, but who’s hot.

Davis Love III, who at 51 won last year at Greensboro, remembers coming out in 1985 as one

of the longest hitters ever seen, yet he spent most of his energy trying to gear down for more consistency.

“If you want to win on the tour, you have to lean toward all out, because pretty much everybody else is,” says Love, who as the U.S. Ryder captain is paying close attention to potential members of his team. “Equipment allows you to hit some shots that were more low percentage in the past, and everybody’s hitting it farther. But whatever your style is, if you want to win, it has to be more aggressive. It has to be geared toward making birdies. No matter how hard the course is, somebody shoots a low score every day. You just can’t go out and try to make a bunch of pars. You can barely make the cut anymore doing that.”

Helping the all-out ethos expand has been the improving conditions for tour players. The upside keeps getting higher, and the downside isn’t as low. Here’s a look:

1 WINNING BRINGS DISPROPORTIONATE REWARDS.

Beyond 18 percent of the total purse, winning carries important exemptions, including spots in the Masters, the Hyundai Tournament of Champions and two-year playing privileges. Winning also carries extra weight in the Official World Golf Ranking, where reaching the top 50 means the good life. Not to mention how winning enhances image and off-course opportunities.

2 EVEN THE BEST PROS ARE RARELY “ON” MORE THAN ONCE OUT OF FIVE EVENTS.

There’s a saying that 80 percent of a tour player’s winnings come from 20 percent of the tournaments. With approximately a fifth of the field playing well in a given week, players know it will take aggressive golf to beat them, which leads to a self-perpetuating style of play. Playing with higher risk might mean more missed cuts, but for a player trying to win, taking a bold approach becomes an intelligent roll of the dice.

‘THEY PLAY
FEARLESS
GOLF. NOT
FEARLESS
STUPID,
BUT
FEARLESS
SMART.’

CHARLES HOWELL III



►►THE YOUTH MOVEMENT GOING ALL OUT (FROM LEFT): JUSTIN THOMAS, JASON DAY AND RICKIE FOWLER.

TOUR PROS HAVE LESS TO LOSE BY PLAYING POORLY THAN IN THE PAST.

A PGA Tour player losing his card used to mean a harrowing trip back to Q school, which if unsuccessful, left only mini-tours, foreign tours or Monday qualifiers. Though the original Ben Hogan Tour in the early '90s did not offer much of a living, what has become the Web.com Tour has created a reasonable safety net, and an opportunity in that tour's finals to win a card back on the regular tour.

Overall, young players who used to feel they were immediately playing defense when they got to the tour now have more freedom to go on the offense.

"With my generation, it was make cuts, get a card, keep a job," says Charles Howell III, 36. "Older players would tell me, 'Charles, it's a marathon, not a sprint.' But now I turn on the TV, and it's the next 20-year-old hitting it 320 and putting good. There doesn't seem to be a lot of 'what if?' scenarios in their minds. They play fearless golf. Not fearless stupid, but fearless smart. They've figured out that it's just better in today's game to step on the gas."

Doing so doesn't have to require power. Among the recent first-time winners, Knox, Kisner and Malnati, although aggressive in seeking birdies, are short hitters who are about accuracy first and being skillful the closer they get to the hole. Knox says he shot at nearly every pin when he won the WGC-HSBC Champions in Shanghai.

"Now all these guys chip like gods," says veteran Jason Gore, who last year returned to the big tour after five seasons on the Web.com. "It's like there's no short side anymore. They fire at the pin even if it's three [yards] off the back-right edge."

However, there is no doubt that aggressive golf goes best with the power that Thomas



►► HIGHEST HIGHS, LOWEST LOWS (FROM LEFT): ARNOLD PALMER, GREG NORMAN AND PHIL MICKELSON.

described. Even Pat Goss, who coaches two preeminent short hitters, Luke Donald and Matthew Fitzpatrick, says, "Ideally, it's best to hit it far. In developing a young junior player, I would make increasing swing speed and strength a big part of the equation."

The value of length is reflected in statistics in which the majority of top players rank highly, in particular strokes gained/tee to green and par-4 scoring average. Both are most easily achieved by players who drive the ball long enough to leave the wedge and short-iron approaches that can produce the kind of pin-hunting spin and accuracy that makes getting inside 10 feet with a good shot a realistic goal. The 10 feet around the hole was quantified by Dave Pelz in the 1980s as the area where good putters make more than they miss. (The tour average for 50-percent conversion today is eight feet.)

Long-hitting elite players like McIlroy, Day, Bubba Watson and Dustin Johnson all rank highly in the stats above. But it doesn't mean they will always beat a hot player who in a given week happens to be doing the same thing even better.

Psychologically dealing with the missed cuts that can come with a higher-risk game can be difficult. "Aggression is fine, but can you handle it when it doesn't

'IT'S LIKE THERE'S NO SHORT SIDE ANYMORE.'

JASON GORE

work out?" Appleby says. A good example of someone who did was last year's rookie of the year, Daniel Berger, who missed 14 cuts but balanced them with six top-10s, including two seconds.

Roberto Castro, whose course-record-tying 63 on the TPC Stadium Course in the 2013 Players Championship was a masterpiece of aggressive play (he hit six approaches inside five feet and an amazing four inside two feet), has made his choice.

"I found I got completely mentally exhausted with a grind-it-out mind-set, and you aren't going to win many tournaments that way," Castro says. "I started to just say, 'I don't care if I miss the cut or blow this ball into the hazard. At least I tried to hit a good shot.' I think emotionally and mentally, it was more fun that way."

As always, the most fun is attained when putts go in. Although top players generally don't rank as highly in putting as

they do in ball-striking statistics, aggression is as vital in putting as any other area of the game at the highest level.

Peter Sanders, who analyzes statistics for Zach Johnson and other pros, has found that the six-to-10-foot range, which provides the most opportunities in normal pro rounds, separates good putters from not-so-good putters. But, he says, the conversion rate from 11 to 20 feet—Spitheth's greatest advantage over his peers—is consistently what most separates winners in the week of their victories. "Every winner goes off in that range," Sanders says. The statistician also tracks proximity to the hole after the first putt, and has found that good putters consistently get the ball to the hole on putts inside 40 feet, where poorer putters leave a lot of them short.

No golfer was more effectively all out than Smylie Kaufman, 24, when he shot 61 to win the Shriners Hospitals for Children Open last October. In a round in which he passed 27 players, Kaufman averaged 328 yards off the tee and hit nine shots inside 16 feet to rally from a seven-stroke deficit.

"If I get a certain amount under par, I don't feel limited," he says. "I stay aggressive to get more under par. That's the best way to win."

It's getting to be the rule. **G**

PROMOTION

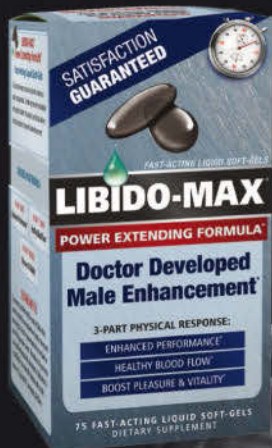


On November 16th, Golf Digest and Topgolf hosted the annual **Golfers Who Give Back Gala** presented by AT&T in honor of Golf Digest's fourth-annual Golfers Who Give Back issue. More than 300 guests gathered at Topgolf Atlanta Midtown to play Topgolf games, enjoy delicious Ketel One Vodka cocktails, compete in exciting shootouts and win prizes from Callaway Golf, Maide Golf, Oakley and Nike Golf. The event raised \$200,000 for various charities, including \$125,000 for the East Lake Foundation, which helps families build better lives and children reach their highest potential through a holistic approach to community revitalization that includes mixed-income housing, cradle-to-college education and community wellness.



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Shirt Swappin'

When a simple handshake isn't good enough

The custom has reached American soil. What began in soccer internationally decades ago now happens every weekend in the NFL. After the game, you peel off your uniform and hand it to an opposing player, perhaps the dude most responsible for all the blood and mud stains, as a gesture of your deepest respect, win or lose.

When it comes to sportsmanship, golf will not be one-upped. So anticipating the

adoption of this ritual into our game—golf is undergoing a period of great social liberation—we thought we would offer some early guidelines. Sure, it might sound crazy, but so did GPS.

First, sweaters are best. If not an option, limit swapping to days when the temperature is moderate and the humidity low. Unlike football players who wear pads and compression undergarments that block the entrenchment of body odor into the fabric, golf shirts can get pretty tangy.

Second, the gesture is meant to be reciprocal. So unless you're unafraid of strutting into

the clubhouse topless, be judicious with your pursuits. Just as Kiradech Aphibarnrat probably hasn't earned the right to ask Rory McIlroy for a swap, don't poach the club champ just because you happened to get paired together in the Tuesday hat pool. By all means, embrace spontaneity and allow yourself to be moved by the events of the day. But a text before the round to confirm a swap will prevent an awkward moment.

Third, swapping is an ideal way to commemorate team events where the spirit of competition reaches a special magnitude, as in the Ryder Cup. However, because the Americans have historically had the

uglier outfits, we recommend our side maybe toss in a hat, too. On the club level, consider parity of logos. Does the guy from Shinnecock really want your Gopher Links Municipal windbreaker?

Fourth, never swap if there's any chance whatsoever you might be in a playoff. It will confuse spectators.

While we're not entirely sure swapping will make its way into golf, we're certain our game needs something new. When we doff our caps on the 18th green and shake hands with everybody, even the caddies, the meaning of the act is diminished in the rush. Taking the time to give a guy the polo off your back? Well, that says you really enjoyed playing with him. Like seriously, let's do this again.

—MAX ADLER



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